WILDERNESS HONEY

FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK

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WILDERNESS HONEY

"Poison!" exclaimed Alice. "Why, it must have been meant to kill the bees!"

WILDERNESS HONEY

BY

FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK

ILLUSTRATED BY
H. C. EDWARDS

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1917

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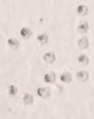
Published, September, 1917



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TO ROSA

WHO HAS HELPED ME TO HARVEST
SO MUCH HONEY IN THE
WILDERNESS

This story has appeared serially in the "Youth's Companion," and my thanks are due the publishers for permission to reprint it.

FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK.

The publishers also wish to acknowledge the courtesy of the "Youth's Companion" in arranging for the use of the pictures.

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CHAPTER I

THE BEE FEVER

"WE'LL have to sell the store," said Bob Harman, with decision. "No use blinking it."

"What, sell Harman's!" cried his sister Alice, aghast.

"Well, why not?" Bob demanded. "It's bringing nothing in. It hasn't been paying expenses for ever so long. We'd all be richer if it had been sold years ago."

"Very likely," muttered Carl. "But fancy Harman's going out of the family!"

All three turned and looked at the weather-beaten side of the frame building adjoining the house—the store that for half a century had been known as "Harman's." It had been a great place in its day, had Harman's. Almost the first

recollections of all three children were connected with the store. They had played behind the counters, been weighed on the big scales; and the familiar, rich smell of molasses and tea and hardware and cloth was like an odor of home. Later they had helped to serve customers—it did not keep them very busy—and for the last year Carl had managed the business almost single-handed. It did seem impossible to give up the store.

The three orphans were holding a council on the front veranda of the old brick house where the Harmans had lived ever since they came as pioneers into Upper Canada. Once there had been three hundred acres of land, and capacious barns and stables, and stock, but all this had dwindled away, till the farm was represented by ten acres behind the house, and even this was rented to a neighbor.

The April sunshine was warm on the veranda, although the fields were still brown, and patches of snow lay here and there in sheltered nooks. The maples at the roadside were red, and in Alice's garden green sprouts were bravely pushing up. On the south side of the fence were the

twelve white-painted hives of her bees, and the hum of flying insects filled the air.

Nearly eighty years before the Harmans had been among the first pioneers who broke into the wilderness north of Lake Ontario. They had helped to open the roads; they had cleared land; and they had started a frontier store on the new highway. For two generations the hamlet that sprang up there was known as "Harman's Corners." It lay on the direct road to Toronto and it had its great days before the railway came. In winter the laden sleighs went past by scores, carrying wheat and meat and timber to the growing city, and the drivers all stopped at the cross-road. The Corners supported three taverns, all doing a thriving trade. The fourth corner was occupied by the store.

As there were no other stores in that district, Harman's had a monopoly of trade, and its owner should have grown rich. But the Harman of that day lacked business enterprise. He was good-natured, slow, procrastinating, and spent more time at the taverns than behind his counter. The store lost ground, and when the railway was

built and passed three miles away to touch at Woodville, the Corners received its death-blow.

Produce went to Toronto by rail instead of by sleigh or wagon. Harman's was out of the line of traffic. The three taverns closed one by one. At Woodville the Elliott Brothers established an enterprising store, with all the modern tricks of trade. The farmers went thither to do their buying, and Harman's stock grew shop-worn and out of date.

Still, Mr. Harman clung to the business, keeping no proper books, but cherishing a vague idea that the store was maintaining his family, while, in fact, it was losing money daily, and all but ten acres of the farm had to be sold. For the last two years he had been ill; for nearly a year Carl had had virtually entire management and had discovered the truth. During this time the Elliott Brothers had repeatedly offered to buy the store. They wished to run it as a branch of their Woodville establishment, and Carl had urged his father to sell. Mr. Harman, however, refused to entertain the idea for a moment, and remained firm up to that March day when he died. Mrs. Harman

had died four years earlier, and the three children were orphans, with what looked like a losing inheritance.

Alice was eighteen years old and had been keeping house for the family ever since her mother's death. She was tall, brown-haired, and gray-eyed; an out-of-door girl, full of energy. She was a great chicken-raiser and an indefatigable gardener. The bees she had had for three years, starting with three hives, and had already acquired a very cheerful bank account of her own from the sale of honey.

Bob was nineteen, dark-haired, rather short, and powerfully built. His turn of mind was highly scientific and practical, and he was trying to get through a course of electrical engineering at the Toronto School of Science, where he was better known as a half-back on the varsity team.

Carl was a year and a half younger than Alice and was her chief assistant with the bees, but he lacked his brother's muscles. He had an idea that something in journalism would suit him exactly, but it was a long way from Harman's Cor-

ners to a daily newspaper office. Meanwhile he looked after the store and attended the Woodville High School when he could, riding to and fro on his bicycle, and tried to prepare for the university.

But educational prospects looked rather bad just then. Everything had to be subordinated to the question of making a living, and Bob had come up from Toronto to help in threshing the matter out.

All the property had been left to the three children, and an old neighbor and friend, Isaac Ferguson, was appointed executor and trustee till the heirs should come of age. But an inventory of the property revealed a disastrous state of affairs.

All the land and buildings were heavily mortgaged. Although no proper books had been kept, it was plain that the store had not been paying expenses for a long time, and there was an appalling collection of unpaid bills—many of them bills for stock that had grown old and worthless. When all these liabilities were cleared off, there would not remain much more

than a thousand dollars from Mr. Harman's estate.

Part of this state of things was no surprise to Carl, who had been in closer touch with the business than either Alice or Bob, but even he rather inclined to the idea that it would be best to clear out the old stock at any price, get in some fresh stuff, and try to float the business for a little longer, at any rate.

"Even if we did sell out," he argued, "we would n't get enough to live on for long, and we 'd have no chance of making any more."

"Elliott's would pay one of us forty dollars a month to stay here as clerk. I was talking to them yesterday," responded Bob. "That would be a good job for Alice."

"No, I 'll never do that, and I don't see how you could go to see those people!" cried Alice, hotly. "If I only had a hundred hives of bees like these we would n't need anything from anybody," she went on after a moment's indignation. "Why, last year I made over one hundred and twenty-five dollars from only eleven hives."

"I wish we had them, too," said Carl, "but we

have n't, so what 's the use. Bees cost about ten dollars a colony here and hard to get at that. I declare, Allie, you could get nearly as much for your apiary as the store is worth?"

"I would n't sell them, though, not for twenty dollars a hive!" the girl declared. "I 'd rather see the store go, by a great deal. What do you think we ought to do, Bob?"

"I don't know," returned her brother, slowly. "Maybe I 've an idea, but the present question to be settled is whether we want to accept Elliott's proposition—to buy us out, I mean."

They discussed the worrying problem all the rest of the afternoon and at supper and during the evening and at intervals the next day. Then Bob had to return to his classes in Toronto and he went away, leaving the matter still unsettled.

Spring came on with the breathless haste of the North. The last patches of snow vanished. The grass grew greener daily; tulips were budding; and the bees were gathering honey profusely from the pussy-willows. Alice and Carl went through the hives, cleared out the winter's dirt from the bottom-boards, spaced the combs

properly, scraped away excrescences of wax and propolis. They were so engaged, when Bob suddenly appeared without any warnng, ten days after his departure.

"Hurrah! What 's up?" shouted Carl, pulling off his hat and bee-veil and rushing to meet him. "You 've got some news. I can see it."

"Nothing much," returned Bob. "Anyway I won't say anything about it just now. Go ahead with your work. And, say, have you got an extra hat and veil? I 'd like to look on."

Bob had never handled the bees much, nor taken any great interest in them, so that both Carl and Alice were surprised at his request. However, they were too busy at the moment to discuss it, and he was provided with a mosquito-net veil, which he draped about his hat. He leaned over the hives as they were opened, peered in, and asked innumerable questions.

"What 's happened to you, Bob?" said Alice at last. "You seem to want to learn the bee business."

"Maybe," said Bob, enigmatically. "Now what 's the best the bees ever do, Alice? How

much honey do you get from them, on an average?"

"Well, this is my pet colony," said the girl, raising the cover from the hive nearest her. Under the board cover was a canvas quilt, which she peeled up, revealing the tops of the combs, each in its wooden frame. At the disturbance, a yellow froth of bees boiled up from between the combs, but Alice unhesitatingly laid hold of one of the center combs and lifted it out for inspection. It was covered on both sides with a thick layer of bees, crowded as closely as they could stand. There were some old veterans that had wintered over, with shiny, worn bodies and ragged wings; there were just-hatched bees, fluffy and yellow like young chickens; there were bees with yellow balls of pollen on their legs, looking for an empty cell to store the bee-bread. They all remained quiet, seeming but little disconcerted at being lifted so suddenly into the daylight. Only the bees near the top of the comb, where a little honey shone in the cells, dipped their heads and began to suck it up in haste. They felt that, if this strange earthquake was

going to destroy the hive, they would at least save what they could. Over Alice's fingers and bare wrists the bees crawled, but made no attempt to sting. They were the purest Italian breed and were almost as yellow as gold.

"I paid a dollar and a half for this queen last year," said Alice, "and—look, there she is now."

She indicated a point about the center of the comb, where the queen, twice the length of a worker-bee but much more slender, was walking slowly and with dignity over the cells, looking into each one to see if it held anything. Finding one unoccupied, she gravely inserted the point of her long abdomen into it and deposited an egg. During this process she was attentively watched by her own guard of half a dozen bees, who kept their heads always pointed toward her, and proffered her honey on their tongues when she had finished. Day and night, Alice explained, this went on, a good queen often laying a couple of thousand eggs in twenty-four hours. These eggs, hatching in three weeks, mean a vast army of workers for the honey harvest.

"This colony brought me in more than twenty-five dollars last year, all by itself," said Alice, putting the comb carefully back into the hive. "It gathered something over a hundred pounds of comb honey, worth twenty-five cents a pound. If one had a whole apiary like that!—but such things never happen. On the average, it 's a good colony that makes ten dollars' worth of honey, and less than that, of course, if you were running a large apiary and only getting wholesale prices."

"Well, I call that good enough," remarked Bob and said no more until that evening after supper, when he consented to bring out what was in his mind.

"It was only a vague notion that I got in my head," he explained, "from what Alice said about wanting a hundred hives of bees. Perhaps there 's nothing in it yet. I don't know. But anyhow, there 's a fellow in our class who lives at a place called Morton, away up in northern Haliburton, and he mentioned to me about a month ago that a man up his way had a lot of bees for sale. I was n't especially interested

then, but when I went back to town last time, I thought of it and made further inquiries. Then I wrote to the owner. Then I felt as if I ought to go up and look into the thing, so I went."

"You've been there? How many hives? What's it like?" cried Alice and Carl together.

"Just got back. Well, it's about the wildest, roughest place I ever saw. The bee outfit is fourteen miles from the railroad, away back in the woods, and you can take your choice of driving over a fearfully rocky trail or going up the river in a boat or tramping it. The bees are on a deserted backwoods farm, where nobody has lived for nearly a year. Goodness knows why anybody ever went there in the first place. But the bees are there all right—a hundred and eighty colonies, all packed outdoors in big sawdust cases. It was too cold to open the hives, but the bees were flying and seemed in good shape. Very few, if any, were dead. Then there's a great heap of apparatus stored in the barn, a honey-extractor, empty combs, supers for comb-honey, smokers—a regular outfit, in fact."

"Yes, but the price?" demanded Carl, anxiously.

"Fifteen hundred dollars."

"That settles it, then," said Alice, with a disappointed sigh.

"Oh, there 's such a thing as buying on easy terms," returned Bob. "Those bees belonged to a man who had no more sense than to try to start a farm among the rocks. I 'm certain he never made anything out of the land, but he surely did have the right instinct for beekeeping. He died sometime ago, his wife and children moved away, and I guess everything he owned was mortgaged, including the bees. Anyway, the whole outfit has come into the hands of the owner of the mortgage, who lives at Morton—a queer character, if there ever was one. He does n't know what to do with all those bees. Last summer he hired a man to look after them, and the fellow either cheated or muddled, for old Farr—that 's his name—told me that there was n't much money in bees, and he thought of melting the combs all down for the wax. But he 'd be glad to sell them and take easy payments.

"He 'd let us keep them on the land rent-free, and he 'd take five hundred dollars cash down. When we sell the summer's honey we pay another five hundred dollars, and the rest in one year, with interest at ten per cent., a chattel mortgage on the bees and positive assurance that he 'll sell us out if we don't come down with the money on the required dates."

"Could we handle a hundred and eighty colonies? We 've never had over a dozen here, you know," said Carl, dubiously.

"I 'll guarantee that we could handle them. I 'll see to that!" cried Alice. "But could we make the money?"

"I believe we could," said Bob, earnestly. "The woods up there are full of solid masses of wild raspberry thickets for miles around, where the timber has been cut or burned over. Nothing yields honey like the raspberry bloom, they tell me. There 's lots of basswood, too. Should n't we be able to get a hundred pounds of honey to the hive, Alice?"

"It sounds to me as if we ought to. It depends on the weather, of course."

"Well, at ten cents a pound wholesale, that makes eighteen hundred dollars that we could count on this year, and next year we should get far more, for the bees would have increased. Why," he exclaimed, growing enthusiastic, "I don't see how we could possibly lose on it!"

"No clover up there, I suppose?" asked Carl.

"No, nor grass either. Nothing much but rocks and sand, hemlock and jack-pine and birch, wild raspberries, and little lakes, and a deep river that runs right through the bee farm."

"We 'd camp out there!" exclaimed Alice.

"No, there 's a log-house that we can live in. But I 'll tell you one thing—living up there would n't cost us much. I must have seen fifty partridges on my way in, and the man that drove me told me that there are lots of deer, and now and then a bear. Once in a while a moose strays down from the North, and there must be ducks on the river. I know it 's swarming with trout. Of course we 'd be taking a chance on the season. It 's generally either a feast or a famine with the bees—a big crop or a failure—but what do you say?"

"Take the chance! Take it!" cried Alice, jumping up in excitement.

"It does seem too good a thing to lose," said Carl. "But we hardly want to exile ourselves up there in the north woods for years, do we?"

"Why not? I think it would be glorious!" said his sister. "But we don't have to. The bees need to be looked after for only four or five months of the year. They 've been up there for over a year, with hardly any attention at all, and they 've got on all right. We can leave there in October, sell our honey, and come back here, or go to the city, or do anything—take a trip to Europe, if we 've had a good season. Carl can go to the university. Don't you see that it 's the very thing for us? It 's the solution of all our difficulties."

"The backwoods all summer, and the city in winter! It would give us some variety in life, anyway," said Carl.

"Yes, and there 's no way of making money so nice as keeping bees. It 's sweet and clean and honest. It 's kid-glove work, too, not muddy and dirty, like farming. And it 's all scientific

and fascinating. Every colony has its own peculiar nature that has to be studied. Some you can pet, and some you have to bully. No one could ever make any success with bees who did n't feel the fascination and was n't full of the love of the thing."

"Well, you 've got love of it enough to supply the rest of us, Alice, though I believe we 'd all like it," said Bob. "But we must n't forget that we can't do anything without Mr. Ferguson's consent. We 're infants in the eyes of the law, and he 's our guardian."

It was too late to go to see Mr. Ferguson that evening, but they talked over the scheme till nearly midnight. They went into all the details and made calculations of their probable profits, till they had worked themselves up into a high stage of enthusiasm. As Bob said, it hardly seemed possible to lose. With a hundred and eighty colonies of bees in a good honey district, they were sure to make some money; but they began to feel desperately afraid that Mr. Ferguson could not be made to see it in the same light.

The next morning they went to see him in a

body, primed with arguments. To their delight, however, they found him by no means obdurate. Their guardian was an elderly, shrewd farmer, who saw clearly that the store could never be made to pay, and he had been pondering for some time upon the best investment for the orphans' inheritance. He promptly advised them to make the best bargain with the Elliott Brothers that they could, but the idea of the apiary came upon him as a shock.

"Fifteen hundred dollars worth of bees!" he said doubtfully. "A pretty big order, ain't it?"

Alice and Carl plunged at him with arguments and examples. Mr. Ferguson, however, knew the success that Alice had made with her bees, and he was willing to listen, questioning them closely about probable crops, prices, and risks. He seemed in a fair way to be convinced, but refused to give any answer at once, saying that he was going to get the opinion of a cousin of his near Toronto, who kept bees. This must have been satisfactory, for within a few days he announced his approval of the enterprise.

Bob immediately went to Woodville and closed

the deal with the Elliotts. Now that their dream was changed to reality, it was something of a wrench to the young Harmans, for the store seemed like an inseparable part of home itself. But they had made up their minds and they went through with it. Bob remained at home a little longer to help take the inventory of stock and complete the formal transfer; and then suddenly there was a new sign over the door that had been "Harman's" for more than fifty years.

They also sold the ten acres of land. The house and the garden and orchard they kept, for only the direst necessity would have made them part with that. There was still a mortgage of $800 on it, but the payments were easy and might be allowed to stand. When all their other liabilities were paid up, they found themselves with a capital of slightly over one thousand dollars, which was a little more than they had expected.

"When we 've paid our first five hundred on the bees," said Carl, "we 'll have nearly six hundred left. That will be ample for us to live on till the honey crop is sold, and after that there 'll be money to burn!"

Some of this capital, however, had to go toward Bob's expenses in Toronto. It was of the utmost importance that his studies should not suffer, for he was virtually sure of a well-paid position after his graduation.

"But I can take a week or ten days off," he said, "and come up and help you get started. I 'm well ahead with my work. We need n't move up there till the middle of May. My exams. will be all over in June, and then I can come up for the busy season with the bees. That will be plenty of time, for the raspberries don't blossom nearly so early up there as they do farther south."

The next thing was to buy the bees, and this was arranged through Mr. Ferguson and a lawyer at Morton. They paid five hundred dollars down, and gave a mortgage on the apiary for the rest, covering whatever number of hives of bees it might contain. This was a shrewd wording, if not a tricky one, for it not only released the seller from any responsibility as to the number of living colonies in the yard, but it also covered any increase that might be made afterward. The

bees were not to be moved from the place without permission, and they were to pay the second installment on August 1, by which time, they calculated, the honey crop would be sold.

Now that all was settled, Alice and Carl were impatient to be off. It was hard to see Elliott's sign over Harman's store, to see the old goods sold off at slaughter prices, and to see the new paint, woodwork, and fresh stock that the old place was getting. Alice declared that she would go all the way to Woodville rather than buy anything next door. It was still early, however, to go into the north woods, but, toward the end of April, Carl paid a flying visit to their new property and came back full of enthusiasm.

"I had n't time to look into many hives," he said, "but I counted one hundred and twenty colonies carrying in pollen in great shape. The maples must be coming in flower, but everything looks pretty cold and dismal up there still. The season seems fully a month later than here. I looked into a few of the rest of the colonies. Some were flying a little, and I found only three dead ones. On the whole, I think they 're coming

into first-class condition, and I believe we 've got a bargain."

Alice was more impatient than ever at this news, but a week of cold, backward weather followed; there were many preparations to make, and it was another two weeks before they finally made ready to leave for the North. It was decided that Carl should go a couple of days ahead of the others and try to make their quarters somewhat habitable. Alice was to follow with Bob, and he once more interrupted his studies for a week to come up and help with the last preparations.

With great care and consultation they got together an outfit that was slim for housekeeping or elaborate for camping, as one might choose to regard it. Alice selected blankets, pillows, cooking utensils, and tableware. Bob packed his fishing tackle and his rifle, a good 38.55 caliber repeater, with plenty of cartridges. They took two hams and a side of bacon from their own home-cured stock, beans, two bags of potatoes, flour, sugar, and other groceries, together with several large loaves of fresh bread that Alice baked her-

self. Another package had to be made of gardening implements; a hoe, a rake, and a spade, and an abundance of different seeds. If she was going back to the land, Alice said, she was going to do it thoroughly.

An ax was needed, too, and a sharp hatchet, a saw and hammer and assorted nails. In fact, there seemed to be no end to the things to be taken —necessaries, all of them. One thing after another was forgotten and remembered at the last minute—lamps and a washboard, soap, books, a looking-glass, a pepper-box. In the end, they had three huge packing-cases, and several small packages. Alice had cherished a dim hope of being able to take a crate of her favorite White Leghorn hens to supply them with fresh eggs, but she was forced to give that plan up.

They took the tools from the home apiary, but the dozen hives of bees they left where they stood. On the last day Alice equalized them in strength and put top stories of empty combs on all of them, so that they could be left to themselves in comparative safety.

Carl then left for Morton, taking with him a

small trunk containing a supply of cooked food, an ax, a hammer, his shot-gun and his fishing rod. Alice and Bob gave him forty-eight hours' start, and then shipped their freight and took the train for the North.

At leaving, they both felt a flood of homesick regret and misgiving. Harman's Corners was the only home they had ever known, and Alice's lips quivered, when she looked back from the buggy as they drove to the station. Bob himself felt a sudden doubt as to whether he had been right in proposing and urging the speculation. A bad season, a little hard luck, and they would be utterly stranded and penniless.

But these forebodings gradually evaporated as the train went northward, skirting Lake Simcoe, crossing the Muskoka country, running hourly deeper into the rocky wilds. It was a slow local train and took more than half a day to make the journey, so that it was late in the afternoon when they at last stepped out upon the board platform of the little Morton station.

A sharp chill in the air reminded them that they had come a hundred miles due north. Morton

had once been a flourishing lumber town, operating four sawmills, but the pine had long since been cut away, and the place had greatly declined, like Harman's Corners. It seemed to consist of only a couple of dozen houses, two or three stores, and a frame hotel. The dark evergreen forest apparently came close up to the town in every direction, but Bob informed his sister that a few determined farmers tried to get a living out of the rocky soil, and several French half-breed families lived near the village, contriving to support existence on a little lumbering, a little trapping, and a little guiding. In November the district woke to temporary life, with the influx of deer hunters from farther south.

It was much too late in the day for Bob and Alice to think of driving to the apiary, so they went to the little hotel, where, at this season, they were the only guests. After engaging their rooms, they proceeded to look up Mr. David Farr, who held the mortgage on the bees.

They found him in the post-office and store which he owned. He was postmaster, and also, as they learned later, justice of the peace, clerk of

It was not without a secret feeling of misgiving that Alice and Bob bade farewell to Harman's Corners

the township, and road inspector. Besides being the leading merchant of the town, he bought furs and ginseng, dealt in local mortgages, occasionally traded in timber, and had an interest in a mica mine that was trying to succeed near the village. This last speculation seemed to indicate a sort of sporting spirit, which was perhaps what had induced him to lend money on so risky a security as a yard of bees, even at ten per cent. interest. He was a little, withered man, more than sixty years of age, with white hair, a straggly beard, gimlet eyes, and a not unkindly mouth.

"Well, here 's the young people that 's bought the bees," he said, wrinkling up his face into a dry smile. "You expect to make a fortune outer 'em, hey, young lady? Well, I don't say as you won't. But you won't get what you expect to get. Folks never does, not in anything."

"Oh, we don't expect much, Mr. Farr," said Alice, laughing.

"Now, don't tell me that. You know you do. But it 's always best to expect nothing and then be surprised and thankful. Now whenever

you 're in town, just come and see me, and I 'll do what I can to see you fixed right."

"I 'm sure you 're very kind—" Bob began.

"No, I ain't, neither. Don't you look for no kindness from me. I want to help you to get along, so 's you can pay me my money. Kindness and business is separate things, and I always keep 'em separate. As I told you, young man, if you don't live up to the terms of the mortgage I 'll seize you up the minute the law allows me. Now you both come along home with me and have supper."

They had supper with Mr. Farr and his wife and slept at the hotel. Next morning they found their freight boxes awaiting them at the station, and hired a team to haul them to the apiary. It was the same driver who had taken Carl out two days before, and he mentioned the fact that Carl had borrowed his dog to keep him company till the others came. As they were having their boxes and bales loaded on the wagon, Mr. Farr strolled up to see them start, and he again impressed upon them his intention of being abso-

lutely relentless in case they failed to keep to the strict terms of the sale.

"And the old fellow means it, too," said Bob, when they were off. "He 'll sell us up in a minute if we don't produce the cash on the first of August. I fancy we need n't fear him, but what a wretched old skinflint he is!"

"I don't know," said Alice, laughing. "I rather like him."

It was fourteen miles to the bee farm, and after the first mile from the village the road grew terrible. In some places it was of corduroy logs. It went up and down steep hills, and for long stretches it was strewn with large, loose rocks, which made Alice's tinware clash and jangle in the boxes as the wagon lurched along. It was impossible to go faster than a slow walk, and even then the riding was so rough that Bob and Alice got down and walked for much of the way.

The May morning was sunny and warm, and the highland air sparkling. The road ran between dense, tangled masses of second-growth spruce and hemlock, now and then broken by a

wide burned slash, thick with raspberry canes. These were just beginning to grow green, and the young beekeepers looked at them with great interest, for their fortunes depended on these prickly jungles.

Now and then they caught a glimpse of a small lake. Several times ruffed grouse rose with a roar and thunder behind the screen of evergreens, and once their driver stopped to point out the slender, delicate hoof-mark of a deer on a bit of sandy road.

They had left Morton at eight in the morning. It was after noon, and they were hungry, and tired with walking, and sore with riding, when the driver pointed with his whip across the hemlocks.

The trail curved suddenly. There was a desolate, stump-filled clearing, with the squat forms of several log buildings at the other end. All about them stood rows and rows of large, rude-looking boxes painted dark red, and above the creaking of the wagon they caught a deep, distant roar of insect wings.

"Oh!" cried Alice, "the bees!"

CHAPTER II

TROUBLE IN THE DARK

AT first they saw nothing of Carl, but as the wagon lumbered up through the stumpy clearing, he came dashing around the cabin with a whoop of delight. He was carrying his shot-gun and was accompanied by a fox-terrier, which rushed to the wagon, barking loudly with joy.

"Hurrah!" cried Carl. "I 've been looking for you all day. Here 's your dog," he added to the wagoner. "Thanks. He 's been a great help to me."

"Carl!" Alice screamed. "What in the world is the matter with your face?"

"Have n't been fighting with Jack, have you?" inquired the driver. "You and him both look as if you 'd been up against it."

Carl grinned rather sheepishly. His face was badly scratched. A long strip of sticking-plaster extended from his ear to his chin, and there was

a crisscross of red lines across his cheek. His hands were marked too; one thumb was tied up in a rag, and the white back of the fox-terrier showed half a dozen deep, fresh scratches.

"Oh, nothing," he said, hastily. "Only skin-deep scratches. Nothing but a bad scare, really. Got our freight all right? Want something to eat?" he added, winking furiously at his brother as a hint to drop the subject of his wounds.

Bob took the hint, nudged Alice, and, though they were both full of curiosity, they said no more, but busied themselves with taking the load off the wagon and hauling the boxes inside the house.

"Oh, what a delightful place!" cried Alice, at the doorway. "And how frightfully dirty!"

"Dirty?" returned Carl, indignantly. "You would n't say that if you 'd seen it when I came. The whole place was full of dead leaves and rubbish. The door had stood open all winter, I guess. I 've been cleaning it out ever since I got here, and I call it in pretty fair shape, considering. Why, the chimney was full of dead leaves and old birds' nests. There was a family of

squirrels living in the roof, and down under the floor there was—well, I 'll tell you later," he added in a whisper.

"I don't want to wait," complained Alice, peering curiously about the place that was to be their home for the next few months.

The building was about twenty feet wide and thirty long, and was divided across the middle by a partition of boards. One of the rooms so formed was evidently the main living-room and kitchen; the other was subdivided into two small bedrooms. Each of these contained, by way of furniture, a rough wooden bunk and a large shelf fastened to the wall, which might serve as a dressing-table.

The large room had a big fireplace of rough stone, with a fire that Carl had lighted still smouldering. The floor was of planks, and at one point stained and splintered, as if by a gunshot. It had been a rather well-made cabin, and the logs were chinked with lime plaster, but much of the chinking had fallen out, and the cracks yawned wide. There were two windows in the larger room, and one in each of the small ones,

with a good deal of their glass remaining. A ladder ascended to a black hole in the ceiling that formed the entrance to a loft under the rafters. Dust and soot were on the log walls, and a decided odor of smoke clung about the whole place.

"Everything is all right now," Carl assured them. "And the bees are in splendid shape. I 've been looking at them. Now I know this man wants to start back to Morton as soon as he has rested his horses a little, so as to get home before dark, and I propose that we all have something to eat."

"Good idea!" said Bob. "I 'll open the box that has our provisions in it."

"Hold on. I 've got something better than that!" cried his brother. "Just come with me."

And he led the way around the cabin to an old rain-water barrel that stood beneath a trough from the eaves. It was half full of water, and, as they bent over it, there was a swirl and a flash of orange below the surface.

"Twenty-seven trout!" said Carl. "I caught 'em all in about an hour and a half this morning, and put 'em here to keep alive till you came.

One of 'em must weigh four pounds. I tell you, we won't starve here till the river runs dry."

"Fried trout and bacon! Splendid!" exclaimed Alice. "Get out about three pounds of those fish, Carl, and clean them. I 'll build up the fire, while Bob gets out the frying-pan and all the eatables he can find."

In less than an hour they had their first wilderness meal, which their appetites would have made delicious, even if Alice had been a worse cook than she was. The fried trout, rolled in meal, were excellent; so was the bacon and home-made bread; and if there was a shortage of forks and plates, and neither chairs nor table, nobody minded it at all.

As soon as they had finished, the driver started back toward Morton, followed by the fox-terrier. The three apiarists were left alone on their new kingdom, and Alice at once fixed expectant eyes upon Carl.

"Now tell us about it," she demanded. "What on earth happened to you before we came, and what was the horrible thing you found under the floor of the house?"

Carl smiled in the same uneasy fashion as before, and touched his wounded face tenderly.

"I did n't want that fellow to hear it," he explained, "for it 's a queer sort of thing, and very likely he 'd have thought it was a lie. It 's rather a joke on me, too, though it did n't seem funny at the time. I don't think I was ever so scared in my life.

"We were late in getting off from Morton, and had delays on the way,—one of the tires came off,—so that it was nearly sunset when we got here. It was a chilly, dark evening, and looked like rain. The old shanty was about the dreariest-looking place I ever saw. I 'd seen it before, but it looked different in the sunshine. The door was standing open, half-blocked by a great drift of leaves and rubbish. The chimney would n't draw; it was choked with birds' nests, and, of course, there was n't a stick of furniture in the place.

"The driver was in a hurry to start back, for he wanted to get home before midnight, and he helped me to carry my trunk inside, and got ready to go. I did n't like it; I had n't any taste at all

for being left there all alone, and I proposed that he leave Jack, the terrier you saw, to keep me company. I knew you would be coming out in a couple of days, and the dog could be sent back.

"So we tied Jack up in the house, and the man went off. I cleared away the leaves so that the door would shut and got in some firewood for the night and poked out the chimney with a pole, so that I could make a fire without being choked with smoke. Then I opened the trunk and got out the grub that I 'd brought.

"A bright fire made all the difference in the world, and the house did n't seem so lonely. Jack was awfully interested in a broken hole in the floor, and I thought a groundhog probably had its den under there. I called him and untied him, and we ate bread and cold ham, sitting on my trunk in front of the fire, and were quite comfortable.

"All my bones were sore with the rough ride out from Morton, and I felt sleepy. It was n't long after dark when I made up a pile of dead leaves and old spruce twigs from one of the bunks in the bedroom, and lay down on my blanket. I

was tired, but I could n't go to sleep. I felt nervous and on the alert. I fancied I heard something moving under the house, and Jack kept startling me by constantly bristling up and growling. I was awfully glad I had him, though, and I was glad I had my gun. I had it standing loaded against the trunk."

"Goodness! I would n't have spent the night alone in this place, not for—for a million hives of bees," said Alice, shuddering.

"Well, I don't know that I would have either, if there had been any chance to get away," Carl admitted. "But I had to stay, and at last I did go to sleep. I must have slept soundly, too, for I woke in a kind of daze at hearing Jack bark. The fire had almost burned out; there was just a glimmer from the coals. I could n't see anything, but off in the corner Jack was barking furiously.

"I thought he had found a rat. I was sleepy and cross and called him to come back. He must have thought I was encouraging him, for I heard him make a rush. There was an awful snarling, and a yowl like a scared cat's, and a wild rough-

and-tumble scrimmage across the floor in the dark. I jumped up, wide awake, you can bet, just as Jack broke away and rushed back to me. He seemed to have been whipped. He was whining and trembling all over.

"Then from the other side of the room I heard a sort of purring growl, exactly like that of a fighting tom-cat, rising into a squall every few bars. I could n't see anything, but after a while I made out a pale greenish pair of spots, like eyes.

"I felt pretty sure that it must be a lynx that had strayed into the shanty somehow, and now that the shock was over I was n't so much scared. A lynx is n't very savage, nor very hard to kill, they say. I reached around for the gun, and when I cocked it with a click the beast squalled again. I aimed square between the shining eyes and pulled down.

"The flash half blinded me. The place seemed full of smoke, and Jack charged through it, barking. I heard something rush across the floor, and Jack followed it into the little room.

"I wanted a light badly. I tried to poke up the fire, but it was too nearly out. I lighted a match.

The floor was torn up with shot and spattered with blood, just as you see it, but there was n't any dead lynx. I got a glimpse of Jack at the door of the bedroom, barking and looking back, and then my match went out.

"I put in another shell and lighted another match. Jack ventured further into the room when I came to the door. I could n't see anything, and stepped inside. The match burned out and dropped, and I was feeling for another when something hit me on the shoulder—something alive.

"It was like a small flying tiger. Before I knew it I had got this rip down my cheek, and then two or three more. I felt the soft, cool fur against my neck, and it 's a wonder it did n't rip my throat open."

"What on earth was it?" cried Alice, excitedly.

"I did n't know myself," returned the narrator. "It was too small for a lynx, but I was fairly cowed by its ferocity. I grabbed it and tried to throw it off. It bit me half through the thumb, but I managed to tear it loose from my coat and fling it down. It mixed up with Jack; there was

an awful howling, but I was making for the door.

"I did n't stop till I was outside, and Jack was n't long after me. He 'd been beaten again. It was pitch-dark and raining a little, and I cooled down, and the rain washed the blood off my face.

"I thought at first that I would n't go into that house again till daylight, but I gradually got my nerve back. I wanted to find out what sort of beast it was that was living in our cabin. Besides, I did n't want to spend the rest of the night outdoors in the rain. It was n't quite one o'clock. I looked at my watch with a match."

"You might have gone to the barn," Bob suggested.

"It never occurred to me. Anyhow, I ventured back to the cabin again. Everything was quiet. I got to the fireplace and made a blaze of dead leaves. It lighted up the whole place, but there was no sort of animal in sight, though I could n't see much into the small room.

"So I made up a torch of spruce branches and tiptoed up to the bedroom door again, with my gun ready and the torch in front. Jack charged in ahead of me. I could see well this time. The

snarling growl began again, and there on the shelf beside the head of the bunk was a cat."

"What, a wildcat?" Bob exclaimed.

"Tame wild cat. No, I mean a wild, tame cat. Anyway, it was wild enough for anything. Its fur stood on end all over its body, making it look almost huge. Its ears twitched; its tail snapped; its eyes fairly blazed; and it kept up that singing snarl all the time. It seemed to be paying more attention to the dog than to me, and Jack took precious good care not to come too close.

"At the next glance I saw another cat, a Maltese one, lying dead on the floor. That must have been the one I shot at. Then it struck me that I was up against a whole family, and I looked around for more of them. There was another in a dark corner, with its back arched and its tail puffed like a feather boa. But that one seemed to want to hide more than fight, and I could n't see any more.

"I could n't help grinning to think how scared I had been by a cat. These brutes must have belonged to the last people who lived here, and they had been running wild ever since. I did n't want

to shoot them. I like cats myself, but not that kind, and I had to get them out of the house for the sake of peace and quiet the rest of the night."

"I expect the poor wretches were half starved. You might have tamed them, Carl," Alice suggested.

"I 'd like to have seen you calling 'Kitty, kitty,' to that snarling young tiger perched on the shelf. No, I threw lumps of wood and bark. When that did no good, I took a loaded shell out of my pocket and threw it as hard as I could. That hit the beast on the back, and it made a leap and lighted square on top of Jack. He had come up too close.

"For a minute all I could see was a tangle of white and gray fur, spinning like a wheel, making every imaginable sort of dog and cat fighting noise. The second cat joined in with its noise, and the uproar was something awful. But Jack was no match for the cat. He broke away with a howl, and rushed behind me.

"The cat jumped after him, blind with rage. I kicked at it, and the beast fastened on my trousers, scratching and biting like a demon. I hit it

with the gun-butt, and beat it with the torch. Fire flew in all directions. The cat let go at that, but a lot of dry leaves on the floor caught fire and flashed up, and in a moment the whole place was full of smoke.

"I rushed out again, with Jack in front. At the door I stumbled over something soft that snarled at me. When I was fairly outside I looked back. The small room seemed all on fire, and I began to wonder what Mr. Farr would say if I burned his cabin down on the first night. But the flame was only from light stuff; it did n't catch on the logs, and in a few minutes the place was dark again.

"I felt pretty certain that the cats were driven out, but I had no idea of going back to see. I knew when I was licked, and I think Jack felt the same way. Then I remembered the barn and I stumbled down there through the beehives. It was a pretty rough place, but it was dry and there were n't any cats. In the morning I went back to the cabin and cleaned up the mess."

"Find any more cats there?" Bob inquired.

"Only the dead one."

"What was it like?"

"Just a big, gray tom-cat. The biggest I ever saw, though. It must have weighed twenty pounds. The fur was badly scorched off, or I think I 'd have skinned it."

"Cats go wild very easily," Bob remarked. "It 's common enough for a cat to take to the woods. They 're never more than half-tamed animals at the best."

"It 's no wonder the poor brutes were savage, after living here for a year, and all through the winter too," said Alice. "If I ever see any more of them I 'll try to tame them."

"I wish you luck," said Carl, ironically. "But these cats were n't poor brutes. They 'd been living on the fat of the land. I found the hole through the floor into their den underneath, and I took up a plank. There were gnawed bones of rabbits and partridges there, and all sorts of game. Very likely a litter of kittens had been raised there. If they don't get killed, there 'll soon be a new breed of wild animal up in these woods."

"You had an awful time, Carl," said Bob.

"And I 'm sure we 're properly grateful to you for clearing out the wild beasts before we came up. But you really ought not to have come here alone. I never thought of danger, but there might have been a lynx or bear in the cabin."

"Nothing could have been worse than what there was. However, my scratches did n't go very deep, and I had some sticking-plaster in my trunk. Never mind the cats. Let 's go out and look at the bees."

"Yes, let 's see them, and then I want to explore the whole place!" exclaimed Alice.

Both the boys had examined the bees before, but this was Alice's first good look at the apiary, for there had been time for only a hasty glance before dinner. They walked down the rows of hives, through clouds of flying bees that were too busy to be bad-tempered. The hives were arranged in long rows between the house and the barn, facing the southern sun, and there were seven of these rows of great, red, winter cases holding two or three hives each. As far as outside appearances went, the bees appeared to be in good condition. They were flying thickly

from the small winter entrance-holes, and coming in by scores with balls of greenish-yellow willow pollen on their legs. This profuse pollen-gathering is always a good sign. It shows that there is a queen in the hive, and a big brood to be fed on this "bee-bread," and this means a multitude of workers for the still-distant harvest.

Alice lifted the heavy cover of one of the cases. It was packed with sawdust to the height of the enclosed hives, and on the top of each of the two colonies was placed a large, thick cushion of burlap, packed with chaff, to keep the warmth down.

Alice raised the cushion and peeled back the canvas quilt covering the frames. A gush of bees boiled up, taking wing instantly and circling about with an angry "biz-z!" Two or three dashed against the girl's face, but did not actually sting, for a bee must be driven to absolute frenzy before it makes up its mind to sting and die. But Alice closed the hive hastily, and they all moved on to a more peaceful quarter.

"These bees are blacks and nervous in their temper," said Carl, laughing. "You can't handle them like your Italians."

"We 'll tame them," Alice returned. "But did you notice the shape that colony was in. It was boiling full of bees from one side to the other. Black or not, it 'll get ten dollars' worth of honey if there is any bloom in the woods this summer."

"Oh, lots of them are like that," Carl assured her. "See how they 're carrying pollen. But we must have a regular overhauling,—open every hive and go through it to see if they have honey enough to carry them through the spring, and what kind of queens they have, and everything. We must keep track of the internal condition of each one."

"What! The state of every single hive?" exclaimed Bob. "Why, nobody could remember it."

"If you 're going to be an apiarist, Bob, you must use the right terms," corrected Alice, laughing. "Colony, not hive. The hive is merely the box that the colony lives in. Oh, yes, a good bee-keeper knows the condition of every colony. It makes it easier to have them all numbered, and then a record can be kept in a note-book. We should do that."

"Fine training for bad memories, I should think," Bob remarked. "Now down here in the barn is all the miscellaneous bee-stuff. Let 's have a look at it and see if we 've got value for our money."

The barn was some thirty yards from the house. It was also built of logs and was not very much bigger. Although small, however, it was probably large enough to hold any crops that farm ever produced. Part of it was partitioned off, floored with planks, and seemed to have been used as a stable. In this compartment was piled an enormous, disorderly heap of bee-supplies: extracting and comb-honey supers, empty combs and frames, several galvanized honey tanks, an extractor, some worn-out veils, a smoker, and an immense lot of odds and ends.

"I pulled this stuff around considerably when I was looking over it yesterday," said Carl. "That 's why it 's in such a mess now. Seems to me we got our money's worth, if quantity counts for anything."

"A lot of it is probably worthless. Once it was a good working outfit, I suppose," said Bob,

as they contemplated the mass. "But it 'll all have to be overhauled, sorted, and cleaned up. That 'll be work for you when I 'm gone."

"Work for a week, I should think," said Alice. "But I 'll enjoy it. I expect to find all sorts of surprises in that pile. We 'll come back to it again, anyway, but what we really must do first is to set our house in order. Remember, we have n't a stick of furniture."

"Oh, Bob and I can soon knock together some benches and tables," remarked Carl. "There are some good pine boards here in the barn. We have bunks to sleep in, and we can put up some more shelves, and that 's all we 'll need, for we 'll be outdoors virtually all the time when we are n't asleep."

But before attempting to do anything with the house, they explored the rest of their domain, or part of it, for they did not attempt to penetrate far into the woods. The farm was said to contain eighty acres, but not twenty were cleared, and none of it was fenced. In fact, the new tenants never did know exactly where the boundaries of their property were. The forest hemmed

them in; as far as they knew, they had no neighbors nearer than Morton, and they could not imagine why the original settler had even chosen that remote and sterile place for a homestead.

"Probably he did n't know how bad the land was until he cleared it," Bob suggested.

About twenty yards behind the cabin was the White River, lined with blossoming willows and alders, now full of humming bees. The river was deep and nearly a hundred feet wide. It ran down to Morton and would have afforded an excellent water-route to the village, if they had had a boat.

The settlers had cleared ten acres in front of the house, removed half the stumps, and had apparently tried to grow oats there. Nearer the house was a spot that had been a vegetable garden; a few onions were still sprouting wild. Nearer the house, to Alice's joy, hollyhocks were coming up, and a bed of hardy ribbon grass persisted.

After this inspection, work commenced in earnest. They built a great fire on the hearth, and Alice filled all the available pots and pans with

water to heat. Meanwhile the boys brought up the lumber from the barn, got out their tools, and gave themselves to furniture-making. It was a busy afternoon, and by evening they were all dead tired, but the cabin was transformed.

Alice had swept and scrubbed it and cleaned down the walls and ceiling. The holes in the walls were closed with fresh chinking of clay and moss, and the broken windows partly protected with pieces of board. Carl and Bob had constructed several stout benches, a table that was strong and solid if not beautiful, and had put up shelves on the wall. A brilliant fire of pine-knots flamed in the clean fireplace, and a few gay lithographs decorated the wall. For further decoration, their guns, rods, and saucepans hung beside the chimney.

The small rooms had been cleaned out likewise. The low, board bunks were filled with fresh spruce and balsam twigs, warranted to cure the worst insomnia, and the blankets and pillows were spread over these forest mattresses. A small bench completed the bedroom furniture, for, in true pioneer fashion, they were all to wash

in a tin basin on a wooden block outside the door. Here too was the family mirror and comb, but Alice had a small private looking-glass in her room.

The boys promised to construct some kind of pantry or cupboard for the provisions as soon as they had the time, but it was too late to do any more that afternoon. They contemplated the result of their labors with great satisfaction, and really the old cabin looked like a very homelike place. Trout and bacon and eggs were sizzling in the frying-pan; the teakettle hummed, and when the supper was finally spread upon the new plank table they all attacked it with the appetites of true foresters.

They helped Alice to clear away and wash the dishes and built up a blazing fire, for the evening was cool. But they were too tired to sit long before it. Conversation flagged; one by one they nodded, and before nine o'clock Carl announced with a yawn that he had to go to bed.

"No fear of cats to-night, I suppose," suggested Bob.

"Not a bit," replied Carl, sleepily. "They

can't get through the door or windows even if they should want to come back, and I closed the way into their den under the house.

Lighting candles, they retired to their rooms, and Carl, at any rate, was hardly on the *sapin* bed when he was asleep. It seemed to him that he had slept only a few minutes, though it was really two hours, when he was sharply awakened by a hand on his shoulder. He sat up, startled and dazed, and saw Alice standing beside him with a lighted candle. She looked wide-eyed and frightened.

"Get up, Carl," she whispered. "There 's something outside, among the beehives. I was so frightened."

"One of those beastly cats again, I suppose," said Carl, shaking Bob awake.

"No, nothing like a cat. I could n't sleep well. I was nervous, and I thought I heard something stirring outside. I looked out the window, and I saw something dim and big and black—like a bear."

"A bear!" exclaimed Bob, clutching for his

rifle, which he had brought into the bedroom with him.

A few moments later they all sallied into the bee-yard. There was no moon, but the starlight was so brilliant that it was not very dark. The rows of silent beehives looked weird and strange, but nothing stirred among them. They searched the whole clearing in vain. There was no trace of any living thing, and at last they went back to the cabin. It was nearly midnight, and cold, and they built up the fire and warmed themselves.

The boys were sure that Alice had been dreaming, but she was positive that she had both seen and heard some animal, and, in fact, was so nervous that they had difficulty in persuading her to go back to bed again. For some time, indeed, they were all wakeful and alert, but they slept at last. Shortly after daylight they were up again, and the first thing they did was to make another search of the ground among the hives. Sure enough, in a sandy corner of the yard Carl came upon a track. It was not very distinct, but it looked as if a bear might have made it.

"I was sure of it!" cried Alice, triumphantly.

"I believe it is a bear track," said Bob. "If we 'd only got a sight of him last night! But we must look out. A bear in this bee ranch might ruin us in one night. All this honey would seem to him like a gold mine."

"Or a forest of bee-trees," added Carl. "Yes, I think we ought to keep a fire burning in the yard every night, even if we have to get up two or three times to make it up. But is n't it wonderful that this apiary has n't been destroyed long ago, if there are bears about?"

The morning air was sharp. No bees were flying till after nine o'clock. It was Friday, and Bob had to go back to Toronto on Monday, so that it was necessary to unpack the bees and go through them all if they were to have his help at this long and heavy task.

They decided to unpack them first, as it would be easier to examine them after they were out of the cumbersome winter cases, and after breakfast the boys began to bring out the wooden, summer hive covers that were stored in the barn with the rest of the supplies. Meanwhile Alice lighted

two smokers and got the hats and veils ready. There were canvas gloves that they had brought from home, too, in case the bees should prove especially cross, and with all this apparatus they went out, ready for the first work on the new apiary.

The winter cases usually held two colonies, and were resting on stands of two by four scantling. Alice puffed on the smoker bellows till a strong white cloud poured from the nozzle, and then blew a strong blast into the entrance hole of each of the two hives in the first case. Panic-stricken, the bees rushed inside, and the boys at once dragged the heavy case a few feet out of the way. Lifting the cover, they threw off the cushions, and then lifted the hives out of the cases, setting them down so that the flying bees would find their entrances exactly where they had stood before. For a bee's homing instinct depends mainly on location. A worker will come back three miles straight to her hive, but if that hive is pushed three feet aside, she may spend hours in trying to find it.

It was hard work. The cases were made of

heavy lumber, and the boys had to carry them away and stack them up neatly. Even when the hives were out, the cases, with their sawdust packing, were as much as they cared to handle.

And this juggling with their homes naturally irritated the bees greatly. The summer hives, different in shape and color from the cases that they had been used to, did not look homelike to them. They failed to recognize them. They hung about uncertainly in the air; they tried to enter cases that had not yet been unpacked; and this caused fighting with the guards. Some of them followed the big red cases and tried to enter them again. They grew vicious and stung, so that the apiarists had to put on their gloves. But by degrees a few began to recognize the odor of their old homes, and set up the peculiar whirr that acts as a call to the whole colony. They flocked down on the entrances in clouds, and stood with heads down and wings vibrating fast in the air—fanning, as bee-keepers call it—which is their invariable way of expressing great joy.

Alice left the canvas quilts over the hives, but

put on the summer board covers, and then they all went on to the next.

"These hives seem to me awfully light," said Bob, as he lifted out the box with its bees. "They surely can't have much honey."

"I hope we don't have to feed them," Alice said, apprehensively. "Never mind; we 'll find out to-morrow. Let 's get them all unpacked to-day."

Packing and unpacking the hives in fall and spring is the most monotonous and heavy task of the whole season, mere hard, fatiguing work, unrelieved as it is by any interest of skill and science. The young Harmans did not finish the job till nearly dusk, and the boys' backs and arms ached when they carried the last case away. But the yard looked more like an apiary now, and its owners contemplated it with pride.

The summer hives were sixteen by twenty inches in size, and a little less than a foot deep. They were not painted white, as is usual with bee-hives, but were all sorts of colors, red, green, brown, yellow, giving the apiary a highly cheerful and picturesque effect. Either the former

owner had had a lively taste for color, or else he had used whatever paint he happened to have on hand.

That night they kept a fire between the rows of hives, and Bob got up once to replenish it. He heard nothing stir, and in the morning there were no fresh tracks. He predicted that a bear would never again venture so near a dwelling, even with the temptation of unlimited honey.

Both the boys had stiff muscles that morning, but they had planned to inspect the bees thoroughly that day, and determined to go through with it. It promised to be a fine day, and the bees were getting enough honey to make them good-tempered; so they could be handled easily.

"I 'm going to show you whether I can't handle these black bees as painlessly as Italians," said Alice when they went out, and she stopped before the first hive in the row. She was wearing the usual black-fronted veil, but no gloves, and she pulled her sleeves high up on her wrists.

The colony was a strong one, with scores of bees coming and going. Alice gently blew a little smoke across the entrance, driving in the

guards; then she blew a stronger puff. A frightened roar arose within. Panic spread through the hive instantly, for smoke is the only thing that bees fear. Alice waited half a minute and then removed the cover and pulled off the canvas quilt.

A flood of bees surged up between the frames, but she drove them down with a puff of smoke before they could take wing. Another strong puff, and she set down the smoker, and with a screw-driver pried loose the outside frame, next to the hive wall.

It came out hard, for the frames had probably been moved very little for over a year, and the bees had glued them fast. When she lifted it out it was covered with a close layer of black bees, who did not remain quiet on the combs like Italians, but scurried here and there, gathered in clusters, and tumbled off on the ground in knots. They ran over Alice's bare hands, but were too thoroughly subdued to sting.

The comb was almost wholly filled with brood, sealed over with brown wax in the center, and the younger brood in a circle around this, looking like glistening white worms coiled at the bot-

tom of each cell. In answer to a question from Bob, Carl explained that the egg laid by the queen hatches into a larva in three days. For seven days the rapidly-growing grub is fed incessantly by the bees, and then sealed over with wax to spin its cocoon and undergo its metamorphosis, hatching in eleven days more into a fully-developed bee.

Alice set down the frame, after looking to see that the queen was not upon it, and took out another. This was similarly full of brood, with a narrow rim of honey along the top. All the rest of the ten frames showed much the same condition, except the one next to the other wall of the hive, half of which was filled with fresh pollen, and half with newly gathered honey.

"This colony must be fed," said Alice, replacing the last frame and closing the hive. "It 's got a splendid force of bees and heaps of brood, but a week of rainy weather would starve it to death. But what do you think of the way I can handle cross bees? I did n't get a sting."

"Highly scientific, but too slow," said Carl. "At your rate we 'd be two or three days going

through the yard. I think I 'll put on gloves for to-day, so that we can get through them faster."

In fact, Alice had been obliged to move with the utmost deliberation, stopping frequently to use the smoker afresh, and it was slow work. So Carl put on the sting-proof bee-gloves, with sleeves halfway to the elbow and half the fingers cut off, took the other smoker, and began work on the next row. Bob, who was not skilled at bee manipulation, acted as assistant to both of them, fetching and carrying the things that the two experts needed.

Carl had no need of gloves for the first colony he opened. Instead of a crowded mass of bees, only a little cluster showed between the two center combs. Lifting one of them out, he spied the queen at once, walking over a small patch of brood about three inches in diameter. There were bees enough to cover only one comb well, and they were all huddled in this central space, trying desperately to build up their colony. These were yellow bees, at least half-bred Italians.

"Will they live?" asked Bob, peering into the pathetic little colony.

"Oh, yes, they 'll come on, but probably far too late to do anything at gathering honey this season," Carl answered. "By the time they 've built up strong the honey-flow will be over."

A moment later Alice uttered an exclamation from the hive she had just opened.

"Here 's something wrong!"

Carl and Bob went to look. The colony was of about one-fourth its normal strength, and the bees, instead of being clustered on the combs, were running and scattering in every direction. Despite the smoke they boiled out of the hive, making a peculiar distressful hum, not easily described.

"Queenless, for certain!" Carl exclaimed, recognizing these indications.

And, indeed, when the combs were taken out one by one there was no sign of either eggs or brood. The queen must have perished in the winter. These bees were all old ones from the last season, and they had no possibility of rearing any young. In a little while longer they would all have died, and they were well aware of their desperate state. They were intensely

nervous and fierce-tempered, yet their indomitable instinct for work had led them to keep gathering honey. As they had no brood to feed it to, and adult bees eat little, they had accumulated almost two combs full of fresh honey from the willows and maples.

"Unite them with that weak colony I found just now," Carl proposed.

"Just what I was going to do," Alice returned.

Carl uncovered the weak colony again, while Bob pried off the bottom from the queenless one. Alice blew a little smoke on both colonies, then Bob carefully lifted the queenless hive and set it on top of the other, making a hive in two stories, with two sets of combs.

At first there was a little disturbance as the bees from the two colonies mixed. Several bees rolled out at the entrance, fighting furiously. Then all was quiet; a contented hum arose within. Lifting a corner of the quilt cautiously, Carl saw the queenless bees standing head downward on their combs, fanning with joy at finding themselves attached to a normal family.

"Now those two together should build up and

do something, and neither of them would have been any good alone," said Alice, with satisfaction.

After these two bad colonies, they came to a long series of good ones, crammed with bees and brood, though nearly all light in honey. Then they found a dead one, with the bees still in clusters on the moldy combs. These contained not a drop of honey; probably the insects had starved. Taking out a comb, Alice pointed out how the bees had crawled deep into the cells, in order to make an unbroken block of heat during the winter, thus making the empty combs almost a solid mass of insects. In very cold weather a strong colony, filling a hive, will crowd itself into a cluster no bigger than a cocoanut.

They worked all that morning, stopped for an hour at noon, and went at it again. By evening they had finished the inspection, and were decidedly disappointed.

Of the one hundred and eighty colonies, ten were dead. Fifteen others were without queens and had to be united at once with normal colonies. From more than twenty hives they had found one

or more frames of comb missing. It was impossible to say whether these had been omitted by the former owner, or whether they had been abstracted since. About twenty more colonies were very weak in bees, and would hardly breed up to full strength in time to gather much honey from raspberries. But more than a hundred colonies were strong; some of them indeed were almost overflowing the hive already, and would have to be given more room soon if swarming was to be prevented.

But the worst feature was the shortage of honey. Without an abundance of food in the hive, bees will not rear brood in profusion in the spring, which results in a weakened condition for the harvest. A strong colony needs about twenty pounds of honey to carry it through this critical time, and few had as much as that. Some had only a small patch of fresh willow honey; plainly they were living only from day to day, and much of the brood would perish if a spell of cold or rainy weather should come. To put the bees into strong condition they would have to be fed. It would take nearly a thousand pounds of honey to

go around, and this new expense would be a hard strain to bear.

It was hard also to face the fact that their profits would have to come from less than one hundred and fifty colonies instead of one hundred and eighty, though they might have known that some were certain to be dead or queenless.

"It was n't really a heavy winter loss," said Alice, "yet with one thing and another, it does look like a poor chance of clearing eighteen hundred dollars."

"Lucky if we make a thousand," answered Carl. "If the season should be a poor one, perhaps nothing at all."

They were all rather tired and despondent. They had rushed into the enterprise full of enthusiasm, and only now did they begin to realize the obstacles ahead of them.

The next day was Sunday. The weather was still fair, and the bees were still busy in the willows and maples. For some reason, in the peaceful May sunshine, the future looked a little brighter to the Harmans. If the good honey-flow from the willows continued, they might not

have to feed after all, or, at any rate, not half so much as they had feared.

There was no necessary work to be done that day, and they were glad of the rest. They watched the bees work in the forenoon; they read and lounged lazily in the sun; and in the afternoon they went for a stroll up the river bank.

The stream was lined everywhere with willows and alders, all in flower and roaring with bees. Trout leaped from the water; once they scared up a pair of wild ducks, that went off with a great splashing and flutter. Several times they saw muskrats navigating along close to the shore, the apex of a long V ripple on the water, and once in a rick of drift logs they caught a glimpse of the slender, graceful form of a mink just diving into a hole.

"I 'll bet there 's lots of fur up here," said Bob. "I tell you, I believe that if I fail in my exams, or if anything goes wrong, I 'll come up here and stay all winter trapping. I could have got six dollars for the pelt of that mink. It might pay better than keeping bees."

"Why, I 'd like that above all things!" Alice

exclaimed. "We 'd hunt and snowshoe, and we could skate right down the river to Morton."

"We could lay in provisions, salt down two or three deer, and hundreds of wild ducks and partridges," added Carl, with interest.

"Yes, and trout, too. Or perhaps we could catch them through the ice. We could pick and dry raspberries this summer, and I 'd make jam—only how would I buy the sugar? Anyhow, we 'd have all the honey we could eat, and in the spring we could make maple syrup. I think it would simply be immense. But I 'm afraid we 'll have so much money that we won't have to do it!" she added, with a sigh.

"I would n't be so sure of it," said Bob. "But by the time I get back I suppose we can tell how the game is going to go."

Bob had to go back to his classes in the morning, and they spent that evening earnestly discussing the plan of campaign. The bees would have to be left entirely in the care of Carl and Alice till Bob could return, but the heaviest part of the season would probably not come till after that time. They made out a list of some necessary

apiary supplies, which Bob was to order in Toronto, and found it hard to order what they needed, without spending more than they could afford. At the same time they prepared an order for half a dozen Italian queens to be mailed by a well-known breeder in the southern states.

"And I 'll buy one good, three-dollar breeding queen," said Alice. "I won't be satisfied till I see this whole yard Italianized. The Italian bees are gentler and better workers, and if we ever wanted to sell the outfit again, we would get twice as much for it if it was all thoroughbred stock."

Early the next morning Bob set out to walk to Morton for the train, and Carl accompanied him to order lumber for making new hives at the local planing-mill. It was late in the afternoon when he returned with the same driver and wagon that had been there several times before, and Jack accompanied them, appearing to have pleasant recollections of the place. Carl brought, besides the lumber, three hundred-pound sacks of sugar, some groceries and provisions, and something else that he threw down at Alice's feet with a loud clanking of metal.

"What do you think of that?" he exclaimed. "If any midnight marauder gets into that, I think he 'll stay with us."

It was an enormous bear trap, that Carl had picked up cheap at second-hand. Rusty and savage-looking, it was a formidable affair, with sharp-toothed jaws and double springs that had to be set with the aid of a lever.

"Good gracious! what a cruel, horrible thing!" exclaimed Alice, shrinking back. "Surely you don't mean to set it? Suppose one of the cats got into it?"

"It would cut him clean in two," said Carl, hopefully. "But I 'm afraid a cat's weight would n't spring it. Certainly I 'm going to set it."

He did set it that night near the beehives, covering it carefully with leaves, and fastening the six-foot chain to a small tree. Twice during the night he thought he heard the chain rattle, and got up hastily to look, but each time he found the big trap undisturbed.

For the next day or two Alice was busy with her work about the cabin. She was making a

Two of the hives that were farthest from the house had been pillaged

garden, planting lettuce, radishes, pumpkins, beans, and potatoes with the seeds that she had brought with her. Around the door she planted flowers and carefully nursed the few stalks that still survived there. Carl meanwhile was sorting out the heap of bee-supplies in the barn, and they were both so busy that they had no time to be lonely after Bob's departure. The bees were still busy, too. The honey-flow from the willows was lasting well, and every day of it meant several dollars' worth less of sugar to buy for feeding. First of all, every morning Carl went out to look at his trap. For three days it remained unmolested. There was no trace of any animal having crossed the bee-yard, but the fourth morning told a different tale.

Alice was getting breakfast, but she hurried out at her brother's cry of alarm. The trap was not sprung, but two of the hives, which were farthest from the house, had been pillaged. One of them lay tumbled upon its side, the combs falling loose. The cover had been pulled off the other, and empty frames from which the honeycombs had been broken out littered the ground.

Masses of bewildered bees crawled over the wreck, too cowed to be savage.

Alice gave an exclamation of horror at the sight.

"What can have done it?" she cried.

"Don't know," said Carl. "But come, let's put these hives together again. If the queens are n't killed, they may amount to something yet."

They set up the hives again, and carefully replaced the frames. For the broken combs they substituted fresh ones from colonies that had died, and while doing this Alice was lucky enough to catch sight of one of the queens sitting on a small stick with a faithful bunch of her bees around her. There was no telling, of course, to which hive she belonged, so they put her in the one that was nearest. The other queen was not to be found, but she might easily have been somewhere among the masses of bees that clung about the wrecked combs.

"Do you think a bear did it?" Alice asked, when they had finished.

"It seems more like a bear's work than any-

thing else," answered Carl. "Let 's see if we can find any trail."

Most of the ground in the bee-yard was too hard and stony to show tracks. Carl began to circle the edge of the clearing to see if he could make out where the animal had entered the apiary.

"Look here, Carl," Alice suddenly called to him from a distance. "What in the world do you make of this?"

Carl hastened up, and found her bending over a monstrous footprint, the like of which neither of them had ever seen before.

CHAPTER III

STRANGE PERILS

THE strange oval footprint was at least ten inches long. The creature that had made it was surely heavy, for it had sunk deep into the ground; and there were four claw-marks.

"Surely that 's not a bear-track," said Alice.

"More like the track of a young elephant, I should think," Carl returned. "That is, if elephants had claws and ever robbed beehives."

It was not easy to follow the trail over the hard ground. Here and there in soft spots they found the huge foot-marks. Apparently the beast had rambled all over the apiary, coming close to the trap several times, but always avoiding it. They followed it across the road, and there it gave out completely.

Completely bewildered, Alice and Carl returned to the cabin for their delayed breakfast. The raid on the apiary was a mystery. They knew of

no animal in the Canadian woods that could have made such a track, though all through breakfast and afterward they discussed and guessed and tried to imagine some explanation. At last Carl, half in joke, began to recount Indian legends of the wendigo,—a giant, cannibal demon supposed to prey on hunters in the North,—until Alice implored him to stop.

"I shall be afraid to go to bed to-night," she said. "Suppose I awoke and saw that great terrible thing looking in through the window at me!"

"Perhaps we 'll catch it in the trap," Carl tried to reassure her. "Don't be frightened, Allie. The wendigo does n't leave any tracks where it walks, and besides I don't believe it would eat honey. It loves stronger stuff, like blood and bones."

"Oh, stop!" cried Alice, putting her hands to her ears.

Thinking it over, Carl came to the conclusion that the tracks must have been made by a very large bear, whose feet were deformed in some way, perhaps by an injury. Perhaps only one foot was misshapen, for he had never clearly

made out more than one track at a time. Anyhow this was the only explanation that he could give for the strange trail.

When darkness fell they gathered a great store of wood and sat late in the bright firelight. They hesitated about separating to their rooms, and Alice, at last, flatly refused to go. Carl did not insist, and they brought out blankets and spread them on the floor by the fire, laying both guns loaded and handy.

Neither of them slept well. Several times Carl jumped up, fancying that he had heard some sound outside; but all was quiet when he opened the door. But toward daylight they both fell soundly asleep and did not awake until the sun was high over the cedars.

The trap had not been sprung; the bees had not been disturbed, and there were no fresh tracks in the yard. Carl and Alice both felt decidedly languid after their bad night, but the hot breakfast coffee was stimulating, and in the bright sunlight they began to feel much more courageous.

Shortly after breakfast Alice caught sight of one of Carl's cats, eating a quantity of trout-

heads that had been thrown out behind the cabin. It was really a wild-looking creature, enormously large, yellowish-gray, and very thick-furred.

"Pussy, pussy! Come here, poor kitty!" she called, coaxingly.

Carl laughed. The cat bristled its tail, growled, and slunk back inch by inch till it was close to the thickets, and then vanished with a leap.

"You could tame a lynx just as quickly," said Carl. "These cats are wild clear through now."

"But I believe we could coax them into the house when snow comes, if we were to stay here all winter," returned Alice. "One of those creatures would be as good as a watch-dog."

Carl presently set to work again at the bee-fixtures stored in the barn, while Alice resumed her gardening. He found more supplies and a greater quantity of them than he had anticipated. There were no less than two hundred supers for comb-honey, all fitted with section-holders and separators, but with no sections. There were one hundred and five deep supers, the same size as the hives, for producing extracted honey, all full of

empty combs for extracting, though many of these had been badly damaged by mice and the bee-moth. In one corner was a great pile of perforated zinc queen-excluders, designed to prevent the queen from reaching the extracting combs and laying eggs in them. Carl rejoiced at this particularly, for these excluders are expensive, and he had been wondering if they would have to buy them. There was also one good smoker and one broken one. There was a four-frame extractor, rusty, but apparently in working condition. There were honey tanks, which only needed cleaning, and there were several hundred brood frames in the flat, which had never been put together. There were also two dozen ten-pound honey-pails, most of which had never been used, and were now too rusted to put honey in; but they would be extremely useful for many household purposes. Alice had been lamenting her scanty stock of tinware, and Carl was gathering these together to carry them up to the house, when he came upon two that were unexpectedly heavy. Opening them, he found them both full of honey that the former owner had somehow overlooked.

It was candied as hard as butter, but was white and delicious in flavor, not in the least injured by the winter cold. Carl carried it up to Alice in triumph. It was a great find.

"If the honey we get this summer is as white and good as this, there 'll be no trouble about getting a good price," he remarked, digging into the pail with a spoon.

Alice finally took it forcibly from him, and sent him back to the barn. He sorted out the different articles, and stored them in neat piles, making a written inventory of the lot. The things that were to be repaired he put aside. Should the season turn out well, they would need more supplies, and certainly they must have about a hundred new hives for the increase they intended to make, as well as for additional supers. But this outfit would give them a good start, and he felt that they had got a bargain after all.

Down at the bottom of the pile he came upon a big fish-net, now rather old, moldy, and torn. Still, he thought it might be mended and made fit for use, and he hung it in the sun. It was not a sportsman's tool, of course. He had no

idea of using it that summer, but if they should want to catch a large quantity of fish for winter salting, it would be just the thing.

Alice, meanwhile, was planting more lettuce, corn, and potatoes on the sunny side of the house. All day they both worked hard, and their fear of the wendigo gradually disappeared. They slept in their own bunks that night, and in the morning they found that the apiary had not been molested.

The willow bloom was almost over now, but the bees were still getting a little honey from the maples. That day Carl and Alice looked over some of the colonies again, and were delighted to find that both the hives that had been raided were getting back into condition again. The queens had survived, and with the strong force of bees that they possessed, these two colonies would quickly recover from their disaster.

A few other colonies were found almost destitute of stores, naturally the best ones, as they had an enormous amount of brood to feed with only a limited supply of honey. Others had honey to spare, and they equalized matters a little,

taking frames of honey from the rich ones and giving them to the needy.

That night passed without disturbance, and in the morning a warm, gentle rain was falling. The roof of the cabin developed a leak, and Carl had to clamber up to make repairs. As the rain lasted all day, more leaks appeared hourly, and he was kept busy with his patching. Between times he went fishing in the river just behind the house. The trout bit ravenously, and he landed one fish that must have weighed nearly three pounds.

The next morning it cleared off warm and damp, and the moist heat caused a heavy honey-flow from the maples. The whole wilderness sprang suddenly into intense green. The raspberry bushes were already beginning to show tiny buds, but it would be weeks yet before these would open, and meanwhile the bees would probably need feeding.

Two days later the supplies that Bob had ordered arrived. They consisted chiefly of brood-frames in the flat, several thousand one-pound sections, and a large quantity of comb foundation.

This comb foundation is one of the most necessary things in a modern apiary. It consists of thin sheets of pure beeswax, about the thickness of blotting-paper and stamped with the impression of honey cells. When fixed in a frame or in a section and placed in a hive, the intelligent insects at once recognize its use and lengthen out the stamped indentations into accurate cells. A comb is thus produced very quickly, and with a great economy of honey and wax.

The wooden section-boxes were in the flat, and had to be folded up into squares, pressed firmly together, and a sheet of the thinnest foundation fastened in each with melted wax. This was delicate and tedious work, and kept the two apiarists busy for the next week.

All the lumber had to be made up into new hives, too, and the frames nailed together, filled with foundation, and placed in them. Carl had set up a work-bench in the barn, and he was busy there from morning to night with his carpentering, while Alice worked with the sections, preparing super after super to be placed on the hives whenever the main honey-flow should begin.

They had too much to do to think much of either bears or wendigos, but three or four nights later Carl was awakened by a noise in the clearing. He had a confused impression that somebody had called to him. The next instant he heard a rattle of metal, and a sound of something thrashing about. He leaped up and pulled on his trousers.

"Alice!" he called. "Get up. Light the lantern, quick! Something 's in the trap!"

There was a crescent moon, but it gave only a feeble light, and as he rushed out with his shotgun cocked, he could see little. But as he approached the trap, he discerned a great, shapeless figure crouched over it, apparently struggling to get free from the jaws. Thrilling with excitement, Carl stopped, then crept a little nearer and raised his gun. He would have fired in another moment, but just then he caught the sound of a human voice. It was not a wild beast in the trap. It was a man!

The fellow was muttering in some unknown language, and no pleasant words, by the sound of them. Carl ran up, trembling at the narrow es-

cape, and the figure straightened up to human proportions.

"Stand still!" Carl cried. "It 's all right. I 'll get you out."

He was so shocked at having so narrowly missed shooting a man that it did not occur to him that perhaps he had caught the honey-thief.

"Take off zis trap," cried the man, with an oath. "He break my leg."

Alice was lighting the lantern in the cabin. In the darkness Carl could just make out that the fellow was caught by one foot. To open the stiff springs of the trap he would need a lever.

"Wait a minute!" he called, groping about for a stout pole.

He found one, bent over the trap, and then uttered a startled exclamation. The man's imprisoned foot looked strangely huge and deformed. He struck a match; the man struck it from his hand, but in the momentary flash Carl saw that the fellow was wearing enormous, padded moccasins.

"Oho!" he cried. "So you 're the wendigo!"

It was not a wild beast in the trap: it was a man!

"No understan'," growled the prisoner. "Open zis trap and let me go."

Carl hesitated a moment. Then he pried down one of the springs, slipped the ring down to hold it, and released the other spring. The jaws fell apart. The man withdrew his foot, almost toppled over, and then painfully hobbled a few steps.

"I git even! I keel you for zis!" he exclaimed, standing on one leg.

At that moment Alice came hurrying out with the lighted lantern, and the man wheeled and started away at a limping run. Evidently he wished to avoid the light.

"Hold on!" shouted Carl, picking up his gun. "Stop! I want to know who you are. Stop!—or I 'll shoot."

The thief flung back some savage answer, but kept moving. Carl discharged one barrel of his gun in the air, but it had no effect, for the next moment the man had vanished into the dark woods. Carl did not care. He had only wished to frighten the fellow, and he would not have

known what to do with him as a prisoner. The thief surely had had his lesson, and he looked after him with a smile.

"That was your wendigo, Alice," he said to his sister, who was pale and badly frightened. "Did you notice his feet? He was wearing great stuffed moccasins to imitate a wild beast's track. I suppose they had nails in the toes for claw-marks. Look here and see the wendigo trail he made."

Sure enough, here and there on the soft bits of earth they found the same great misshapen trail as before, claw-marks and all. Carl chuckled.

"I 've heard of the trick before," he said. "I don't know why it never occurred to me that it might be a human bear. But I don't think he 'll try it again."

"He may do worse, though," said Alice nervously. "He might set fire to the cabin or the bees —or shoot us."

But Carl did not think there was any danger of the man attempting any revenge for that night at any rate. He was likely to be too lame and sore, and he had not seemed to carry any weapon;

so, after watching for a short time, they went back to bed.

But neither of them slept much in the few hours that remained before daybreak. They were up early and tried to follow the trail of the mock wendigo, but they lost it on the stony road. No hives had been damaged this time; the robber had doubtless been trapped before he had time to rob. And the trap must have bitten hard, for there was blood on the rusty, toothed jaws.

Carl had noticed that the man spoke with a strong foreign accent. The only foreigners in that district were the French half-breeds living near Morton. He had no doubt that the honey-thief had come from that settlement, for these people had no high reputation for strict honesty.

He could hardly think that the fellow would try to steal any more honey from the hives, and he did not believe that he would walk all the long way from Morton merely to seek revenge. He tried to impress Alice with this comforting view; nevertheless he slept lightly for several nights, and kept a loaded rifle close to his bunk.

He was right. The raider did not venture

back, and presently the pressure of work drove most other considerations out of their minds. The willow and maple bloom were both over. The bees were getting no honey now, and no colony had honey that could be spared. Feeding had to be resorted to.

They had no regular feeders; this was one thing that the miscellaneous pile in the barn failed to contain. Alice extemporized several, however, by uncovering a hive, setting a tin pan full of sugar syrup directly on top of the frames, and putting the cover over all. In one night the bees would store fifteen or twenty pounds of syrup in their combs, and one such feed was enough to last them till the honey-flow.

Carl incautiously fed his first colony in the daytime and nearly precipitated a riot in the yard. The colony that had been given the syrup rushed out in wild excitement, flying into the air and returning. They knew that sweet was coming in from somewhere, but they did not yet comprehend the source. The bees from adjoining colonies, seeing this excitement, began to rush out likewise; some of them made their way into the feed-

ing hive, finding the entrance unguarded in the commotion, and there was sharp fighting. Fortunately this was a strong colony, well able to defend itself, and the robber bees were routed; but after that Carl was careful to do his feeding after sunset or on a rainy day.

During the day there were still supplies to be got ready for the coming harvest. Another wagon-load of lumber came over from Morton, and soon Carl had an immense stack of new hive-bodies ready for the expected increase. A corresponding number of bottom-boards and covers had to be made as well, so that there was little time now for hunting, fishing, or loafing.

To be sure, almost every day either he or Alice caught a few trout, but this was for food and not for sport, and was done as expeditiously as possible. Often, too, they shot a rabbit or a partridge when it did not involve walking too far. Game was out of season, indeed, but real settlers are exempt from the provisions of the game laws, and Alice became very expert at this sort of foraging.

To his amazement, on coming in to dinner one

day, Carl was confronted with an omelette.

"Why, Alice! where did you get the eggs?" he exclaimed.

"I 'm ashamed to tell you," the girl replied. "You see, we had no fresh meat, and I was sick of pork and fish too, and I took the shotgun and walked out down by the river to see if I might see a duck. A partridge flew up almost from under my feet, and perched on a branch. I shot it without thinking; but the next minute it struck me that she must have a nest. I looked, and there it was, with fourteen eggs in it. I almost cried! However, I gathered them up and brought them home, and they were all perfectly good but two."

It was highly wrong, of course, but the omelette was delicious, and Carl did not reprimand her.

It was now the middle of June, and summer seemed to have come on with a rush. All the trees were in full leaf; the buds on the raspberry canes were swelling, and the bloom might be expected in a week. The days had grown almost hot, and mosquitoes began to appear. Bob wrote that his examinations had commenced, and that he would be able to come up within ten days.

Alice and Carl had pretty well finished their preparations for the honey-flow, and now had a good deal of time on their hands. They fished often, following the river up and down, wishing for a canoe. And they explored the woods in every direction to find the extent of the bee pasturage.

"Why, there must be miles of berries," Carl said. "There 's no end to them, not to speak of lots of basswood. I don't see how we can fail to get a hundred pounds of honey per colony."

Alice's garden was flourishing too. All the vegetables were up, and she tended them herself. This occupation, with the care of the cabin, took up a good deal of her time, and Carl often went on fishing and exploring expeditions alone. It was on one of these solitary rambles that he met with an adventure that he never could forget and never remembered without a shock of horror.

It was a hot, late June day, and he had walked up the river with his fly-rod, fishing at intervals, but for the most part merely loitering. It was too sunny and hot for the trout to rise well, but there was much of interest to be seen in the

stealthy, wild life that swarmed around him. He knew well where a pair of wild ducks had their nest in a marshy spot, and he watched them from a distance. Muskrats could be seen anywhere, and he knew now where to look for the shy mink. At a sandy spot on the shore he found the trail of a deer that had come to drink the night before, and a little farther up he came to the foot of a long rapid.

The banks of the river narrowed greatly here, and the current swept down like a mill-race through the cramped channel studded with sharp, black rocks. The chute was over a hundred feet long, and was a place which only a daring canoeman would have dared to run. A portage would have been difficult, however, for the shore on both sides and for a long way back was choked with dense cedar thickets, a maze of fallen and standing trunks that was nearly impenetrable.

Carl stopped and cast his flies across the tail of the rapid, where he knew big fish were accustomed to lie. The day was unfavorable, however; after half an hour's fishing he caught only two rather small trout, and he began to debate

whether to return or to go through the jungle. It was hardly worth while to go farther, but at the head of the rapid there was an immense burned slash choked with wild raspberry, and he was anxious to see how the buds were coming on.

So he took his rod apart and plunged into the thickets. It was a slow, struggling business and took him more than half an hour to reach the other side, where the rapid began its tumultuous course.

The raspberry slash was fully a quarter of a mile wide and ran off to an indefinite distance from the river. The canes were growing four feet high and were covered with large buds; here and there a flower was almost open. Carl pushed into the prickly thickets for some distance, and was looking at the prospect of bloom with great delight, when he caught a glimpse of a grayish, furry hide vanishing among the bushes a few rods away.

He jumped upon a fallen log and gazed around. Nothing stirred, but he was sure that he had not been mistaken. There was a strip of open ground, ahead where the unknown animal must

show itself if it was coming toward him, and in a few seconds indeed the creature came out from the raspberries into plain sight. It came at a fast, slinking trot, a gray-brown animal about the size of a collie dog, bushy-tailed, carrying its head low.

Carl had never seen a timber-wolf at large, though he had watched them behind iron bars, and he recognized the animal in a moment. He was not particularly frightened, but was very much surprised, for he had not supposed that there were any wolves in that district. Still, he recollected, where deer are plentiful there are almost sure to be wolves, and deer have been increasing very fast in the North of late years. The great Algonquin Park game-preserve affords them a safe breeding-place, and they have spread into all the territory for miles around. Wolves are extremely shy and timid when alone, and Carl stood still and watched it come, in amused expectation of the frantic bolt it would make when it caught sight of him.

But it came on with disconcerting steadiness, though it glanced up, sniffed, and must have seen

him. Carl began to feel a slight uneasiness. The beast's coat looked dull and mangy. There was a curious, jerky motion in its gait, and large flecks of froth on its half-open jaws. As it came nearer, Carl heard a continuous low sound, half snarl and half moan, from its low-hung muzzle.

As if by intuition, Carl realized what was the matter. The animal was mad!

Dimly he remembered now having heard that rabies is terribly prevalent every summer among the timber-wolves, serving, in fact, a useful purpose in keeping down their numbers. The afflicted wolf always leaves the pack and wanders forth alone, spreading its malady, of course, at every chance meeting, till it dies a merciful and solitary death.

Carl had no weapon, not even a knife. It was too late to run, and this would only draw the animal's pursuit. But a dead cedar stood at his elbow, and with a bound he clutched the trunk, and pulled himself up among the dry, spiky branches.

The movement caught the sick wolf's attention, and it sprang forward while Carl was still dang-

ling. He kicked out desperately. His boot caught the wolf on the jaw as it leaped after him, and it fell back with a yelp, while Carl tremulously established himself out of reach.

The unfortunate animal made three or four bounds into the air in an aimless fashion, and stared up blinking. Carl expected to be held captive in the tree for a long time, but in a few minutes the wolf seemed to forget him. It raised its muzzle and howled dismally, then loped off into the thickets, heading down the river.

Carl kept his perch in the tree for some minutes after the animal was out of sight. The peculiar horror of this peril, worse than any ordinary form of death, had completely unnerved him. Then, like a flash, it came upon him that the wolf was heading directly for their cabin.

Alice was there alone, perhaps working in her garden or in the bee-yard or at the barn—certainly somewhere out-of-doors. The wolf would come blindly out into the clearing; and in its madness, as he had seen, it had no fear of man.

The imminence of this more appalling danger shocked Carl out of his panic. He slid down

from his tree breathlessly and rushed toward the river.

The cedar jungle barred his way. It would take him a long time to get through it, so long that he could hardly hope to reach the clearing first. The fast loping trot of the wolf is deceptive, and Carl knew that the animal was moving almost as swiftly as a man could run. It could slip through the thickets with little trouble, but for himself the delay might be fatal.

He turned to the river. If he had had a canoe he would have risked the rapid without hesitating, for the water-way was the only one past this barrier. He thought of swimming down, but just then his eye fell upon a short, thick, pine log, half stranded and half afloat, close to him.

Without stopping to think of the risk, Carl shoved it into the current, waded after it, and flung himself upon it. It would serve as a float, and the spray was spattering in his face before he realized the full danger.

The pine log shot like a bullet down the boiling current, going too fast to revolve in the water, and missing the boulders by some miraculous

good luck. Carl had intended to steer with his legs, but he was half-way down the chute before he had time to make a movement.

In that rush he could only hold his breath and cling hard. His leg struck something; it must have been a rock, but he was only grazed. He plunged through a bank of piled foam with a flurry of white flakes, and he was almost at the tail of the rapid when the log turned and he went under. He let go involuntarily. The log darted away, and for a moment he was choked, battered, and blinded, and then he came up at the foot of the rapid, feeling half-stunned. Several inches of skin were gone from one hand where it had struck a rock, but he had suffered no serious injury, and he regained his feet in about three feet of water and waded ashore.

There was a fairly clear path down the shore, and he began to run, stumbling and dizzy at first, then faster as he warmed to it. He was desperately afraid of overtaking or running upon the wolf, and he kept a sharp lookout as he ran. But he saw nothing of the animal, and began to hope that he had distanced it.

It was a long way, but Carl was a good runner and in fine physical condition. Nevertheless he flagged at last, slowed to a walk, tried to run again, and paused, his heart almost bursting his sides. He was not a quarter of a mile from the clearing, he thought, and he was struggling on at a fast walk, when he heard a moaning howl in the woods, ahead and to the right.

It sent fresh life through him like an electric shock. The sound had seemed to come from the exact direction of the cabin. With a burst of desperate energy he dashed ahead and burst through the willows. At the first glance he saw with a flood of thankfulness that he was not too late.

Alice had a veil on and was doing something at one of the hives between the house and the barn.

"Run, Alice!" Carl yelled, rushing toward her. "Run for the house!"

Alice looked up in surprise and called something back to him, without moving.

"Run!" her brother screamed desperately; and by the energy of his tone Alice grasped that some-

thing was seriously wrong. She started to close the hive quickly, and at that moment Carl saw the gray, dog-like form emerging from the willows, half-way between Alice and himself.

The animal snapped at the branches as it went through, and Alice glanced back just then, saw it, cried out, and started to run toward the house. Instantly the wolf threw up its head, caught sight of her, and with a sort of snarling howl, raced after her.

Carl dashed in pursuit, forgetting that he had no weapon. Alice was losing ground. She would be overtaken before she could gain the cabin; but Carl gained a little with his last stock of energy, and when he was forty feet behind he picked up a large stone, aimed, and threw it.

It hit the wolf hard on the flank. The animal stopped and looked back. Carl threw another stone and missed. But the wolf turned and rushed back at its new enemy.

In his turn Carl bolted, with a confused notion of getting into the barn. But the big door stood wide open when he reached it. The place would only be a trap, and he wheeled about just

in time to meet the rabid animal's charge with a vigorous kick that caught it under the jaw and flung it backward.

He remembered the sharp hatchet on his work-bench in the barn and rushed into the building to get it; but the wolf was after him like a flash. Carl checked it again with another furious kick, so hard this time that it went almost in a somersault backward. As it tumbled, Carl caught sight of the old fishing-seine that he had found.

It was hanging on a peg at his side. He dragged it down, and as the maddened animal launched itself at him again, he flung the net over it.

It stumbled and rolled, entangled. It scrambled to its feet and once more fell, biting furiously at the meshes. Carl seized the hatchet and circled round, looking for a chance to place a blow, but he was afraid to come too close, and the rotten meshes were tearing under the animal's struggles.

At that moment Alice suddenly appeared at the barn-door, with Bob's rifle in her hands.

"Stand aside!" she called, and as Carl leaped away, the rifle cracked.

The wolf leaped into the air, net and all, with a sharp yelp, and fell again, kicking blindly. The rifle banged again and a third time. The wretched animal's struggles grew feebler, and in a few moments it was dead.

Then, with the strain off, Carl collapsed suddenly on an empty beehive, and everything reeled around him.

"Carl, Carl, what 's the matter?" cried Alice, dropping on her knees beside him. "You 're not hurt, are you? The wolf 's dead. Why, you 're dripping wet!"

Carl recovered himself and reassured her. He gave her a toned-down account of what had happened, but she did not suspect that the animal was rabid, nor did he venture to tell her. He warned her strictly against examining the body and presently he dragged it toward the river, dug a deep hole and buried it, net and all. It was several months before he ventured to tell his sister what a frightful danger they had both escaped; but the experience gave him such a fright

that for a long time he never ventured far into the woods without carrying firearms.

Carl felt quite weak and shaky for the rest of that day, and after changing his wet clothes he sat down in the sun, petted by Alice as a semi-invalid. He was quite recovered by the next morning, however, and he went up the river and recovered his rod, which he had dropped in the raspberry slash. Looking at the rapid now, he wondered by what miracle he had come through it alive.

The bees were doing nothing now, but carrying in pollen and water for brood-rearing, and they hung sullen and listless about the hives, very much inclined to be cross. Raspberry bloom was only a few days off; they were all fairly well supplied with food, and there was nothing now to do but let them alone.

Resuming their fishing and exploring rambles, Carl and Alice once followed the river down a little farther than they had ever gone before. About three miles below their cabin they came upon a well-marked trail, and out of curiosity they followed it. They had not gone far when they

came to the edge of the woods and they stopped in surprise.

They were on the border of a wide expanse of reeds and marsh-grass bordering the river. Near the woods it was fairly solid and dry, but farther out they could see a great expanse of quagmire, thinly overgrown with small grasses and spotted with pools of oily-looking water. It was a dangerous, unwholesome-seeming place.

"Why, this must be Indian Slough!" said Carl, looking up and down the marsh.

"What 's that?" Alice inquired.

"A historical spot. I thought I had spoken of it. The driver of my wagon told me about it when I was coming out from Morton, but I did n't think it was so near us.

"The story is that a war-party of Iroquois, during the great Indian raids on Canada in the French days, tried to land somewhere hereabouts, and was swallowed up bodily by this morass. It used to be called *Marais aux Iroquois* on account of that event, and that has been Englished into Indian Slough."

"Ugh!" shuddered Alice. "I don't like it. It

looks as if it had swallowed up hundreds of men. Very likely it has, in its time."

"I 'm sure the mosquitos would swallow anybody piecemeal, if he stayed long here," Carl returned. "Let 's move on."

The trail led around the edge of the marsh, and they had followed it for scarcely twenty rods farther, when, to their amazement, they came suddenly upon the edge of a clearing.

It was only three or four acres fronting the marsh. It was dotted with stumps, and among them stood a log house and barn much like their own. A few hens scratched about a worn-down haystack. A hog lay stretched in the sun by the barn; and as they came in sight a hound dashed into view and set up a noisy baying.

"Neighbors!" exclaimed Alice. "Who 'd have expected it? And why on earth should anybody live in this feverish, mosquitoey, swampy place."

"Probably that marsh is full of muskrats," Carl suggested. "The owner here may be a trapper, and likes to live near his work."

Attracted by the noise of the dog, a couple of ragged children rushed out of the cabin, stared,

and then bolted in again like scared rabbits. A woman came to the door, stared also, and stepped outside.

"I 'm going up to get acquainted," said Alice, and she went boldly toward the house.

Her brother followed at a little distance, loitering intentionally to give Alice time to break the ice. The hound came bounding up, wagging his tail and sniffing at the gun Carl carried, and the boy paused to make friends with him. He was patting the brute's head when a man came around the corner of the house.

He was blinking, and looked as if he had been taking a nap in the sun. Big and strong-framed he was, black-haired, and black-bearded, and his face was almost as dark as an Indian's. He was roughly clad in a flannel shirt, duffel trousers and moccasins, and he looked surprised, half-hostile, and half-shy.

"Hello, good-morning!" said Carl. "*Bon jour!*" he added, guessing at the man's probable nationality; and then, at a second glance, he gasped with surprise. "Why, you—you 're the—"

But the dark-faced squatter, limping heavily on one leg, had turned and dashed out of sight around the house again.

Carl stared after him for a moment and then called to his sister.

"Come, Alice. We must go back."

Something in his voice startled the girl. She glanced sharply at him and bade her new acquaintance farewell and they started back together across the clearing.

"What 's the matter?" she whispered.

"I 'll tell you in a minute. Keep moving—not too fast."

He was not really much afraid of being attacked, but he felt much safer when they were in the cover of the woods.

"That 's where the wendigo lives," he explained at last.

"What! the man you caught in the trap?"

"I 'm sure of it. Of course I could n't see the fellow's face plain that night, but this man has a good general resemblance to him, and he walks with a most suspicious limp—in the same leg, too, that the trap caught. Besides, he bolted as soon

as he had a look at me. He knew who I was, all right. Yes, I 'm certain it 's our honey-thief. What did you find out from the woman?"

"I could n't get her to say much, and I could n't understand half her dialect. She told me their name—Larue, I think. She said there were lots of ducks and muskrats in the slough, and they did n't mind the mosquitos. And oh Carl! she had two of the most splendid black bear skins! I 'd give anything to have them. The cabin was an awful place—like a pig-sty, but there were two children with the loveliest brown, dirty faces I ever saw."

"Probably half French and half Ojibway or Chippewa," said Carl. "Larue certainly sounds French enough. I 'm afraid they 're a rough lot, and I 'm sorry we have them for our nearest neighbors."

They reached home in perfect safety, but the incident revived their former feelings of uneasiness. However, this wore away as the days and nights passed without disturbance; and Carl felt relieved to remember that Larue had seemed far

more frightened at the encounter than he himself had been.

The weather was growing steadily warmer. Frequent rains brought vegetation forward with the marvelous rapidity of the northern summer. The little, pale, greenish flowers of the raspberry were almost open. And at last one morning Carl came dashing into the cabin with a shout:

"The bees are getting honey!"

Alice hastened out to look. The air was full of flashing wings and a resonant hum. The main honey-flow had started. The crisis of their fortunes was at hand.

CHAPTER IV

HONEY AND SWARMS

THE sullen listlessness that had hung over the apiary for over a week was gone. Bees were at work from every hive, coming and going with a swift activity like the days of the willow bloom.

"Hurrah! We must put on the supers at once," cried Alice. "I believe we ought to have had them on several days ago."

Breakfast was hurried through that morning, and no dishes were washed up after it. They hurried down to the barn to bring up the prepared supers, placing one beside each hive, so that they could all be put on at once.

The supers for extracted honey were exactly the same size as the body of the hive itself, without either top or bottom, and each containing eight ready-built frames of comb. The cover of the hive is removed and the super set upon it, then the cover replaced on the top of the two-

story edifice. Usually a sheet of zinc queen-excluder is placed between the two, the perforations so accurately made that they will let the workers pass into the upper story, while the larger-bodied queen cannot get through. The lower story is then known as the brood-chamber, and the ideal condition is for the queen to keep this division constantly full of the cycle of eggs, larvæ, and hatching bees, while the workers store all the honey in the super, convenient for taking off.

A good deal of comb honey in one-pound sections was to be produced also, and Alice had already picked out the strongest colonies for this work. Section honey is a fancy product and sells at a high price, and the apiarists counted on this to pay off the $500 due in August. For that reason, the comb-honey crop was of the most immediate importance, though there would be a greater quantity of the extracted honey. Naturally, bees will store much more honey when built combs are furnished them, but the extracted honey sells more slowly, and at little more than half the price.

They had already prepared more than a hun-

dred section supers,—boxes of the same length and width as the brood-chamber, but only half the depth,—each containing thirty-two sections with foundation. One of these was set accurately on the top of each of the seventy colonies selected to gather the fancy crop. The deep, extracting supers of built combs were distributed among the rest of the bees.

Carl and Alice worked hard all that day and for part of the next forenoon, putting on the supers. The weather was hot and moist, splendid honey weather. More and more of the pale raspberry blossoms were opening, though as yet the honey-flow was barely at its start.

That evening Alice peeped into some of the newly placed supers, irresistibly curious to know what the bees had done. The supers of combs were full of the insects, cleaning out the cells and varnishing them ready for honey-storage, and here and there was even a glistening patch of fresh honey. In the supers of sections no combs were yet built of course; but the bees were clustering there in masses, and evidently preparing for work in earnest.

All looked most promising, but both she and Carl knew that everything depended on the weather from day to day. For the honey-flow is the most capricious thing in the world. If the weather is too wet, the bees cannot work, and the honey is washed out of the blossoms. If it is too dry, the secretion of nectar in the flowers will cease altogether. A cold spell, too, will check the honey-flow, and high winds will dry it up. Often the clouding over of the sky, or a shift in the wind will produce a heavy flow or stop one. It is regulated by faint differences of temperature and moisture, and the ideal weather is warm and damp, with, if possible, a suggestion of thunderstorm in the air. In such a day a good colony of bees will often bring in ten pounds or more of honey, so that Alice and Carl had figured that every good day would be worth easily a hundred dollars.

The next morning was warm, and the bees worked merrily. Now that the honey-flow had started, they were no longer cross. Their owners could walk up and down the rows of hives, through the clouds of flying bees that came almost

as thick as snowflakes, and there was scarcely any danger of being stung. Carl was standing in the midst of this activity, observing the flight with satisfaction, when a volley of bees suddenly poured with a loud roaring from one of the hives nearest him.

"Swarm, Alice!" he yelled.

It was the first swarm of that season, and of course it came from one of the strongest colonies. Carl marked the hive that had sent it out and turned his attention to the bees in the air.

For some seconds the cloud of insects swirled round and round, then it drifted slowly toward the cabin. Finding no place to alight there, it floated irresolutely about in one direction and another, and finally moved down toward the river, flying about twenty feet from the ground.

Here it suddenly concentrated by a small cedar tree. A few bees settled on the tip of a long branch; in a moment there was a brown cluster, growing as he looked at it, and in five minutes the branch was bending down under the weight of a mass of bees that would nearly have filled a five-gallon pail.

"What a tremendously big swarm!" exclaimed Alice, who had come to look at it. "Did you see the hive they came from? Then let 's attend to it, and then we can hive the swarm."

When they removed the cover of the hive that had swarmed, the super was seen to be nearly empty of bees, though it contained a good deal of fresh honey. Lifting it off, they saw that the brood-chamber also appeared sadly depleted. Fully two-thirds of the bees had gone with the swarm.

"Is n't there any way of keeping them from swarming, Alice?" asked Carl. "We 'd get so much more honey if the colonies did n't break in two like this."

"None," Alice replied, busy with the smoker. "Except by seeing that they always have plenty of storage room for honey. They don't usually swarm till they get crowded. This colony was probably feeling crowded before we put the super on it; they got the swarming idea fixed, and when the honey-flow started well, away they went."

Meanwhile Alice was taking out one comb after another, glancing at each and replacing it, till she

came at last to the most marvelous thing in the world of bees—the mystery of the queen-cells.

There they were, five or six on a single comb, great, peanut shaped protuberances, some sealed with a rounded capping, others still open at the tip, showing the white young queen within, floating in a mass of royal jelly.

For when the bees become queenless, they have the science to rear a new one to save the colony from perishing. An ordinary worker-egg that is just hatching into the larva is profusely fed with royal jelly, that strangely prepared food of which no one knows the exact composition. Instead of growing in the ordinary cell, the larva is given one of these great waxen cones for its nursery; and instead of hatching in twenty-one days into a worker bee, it hatches in sixteen into a fully fledged virgin queen. The first preparation for swarming is the starting of a batch of these queen-cells, so that the colony shall not be left queenless when the queen departs with the swarm, and the swarm does not leave till some of the cells are sealed over.

Whenever a queen loses her life, or grows so

old as to be useless, the same sort of queen-cells are started to replace her. The only exception is when a queen dies in the winter, and there are no eggs from which a new one can be reared; and then, unless man gives help, the colony quickly vanishes.

Carl had seen queen-cells often enough before, but he never ceased to regard them with amazement. He peeped into an unsealed cell, took out a little of the thick, white, royal jelly and tasted it on the end of a twig.

"Rich, thick, sour, and sweet all at once," he commented. "It turns a worker into a queen. I wonder what it would do to me if I ate a lot of it."

"You 'd be a king," said Alice, promptly. "Put those cells back. They 'll get chilled. And let 's go and catch that swarm."

Carl had a number of hives prepared for such emergencies, each with ten new frames of foundation. The old hive, now out of action, they carried away to a new stand, and placed the prepared hive where it had stood. Upon it they put the partly-filled super that the swarm had left.

Alice now brought out the large water-pail from the house, and they walked down to where the swarm was settled. It still clung there in a big, brown, murmuring, pearl-shaped mass. There they would probably hang for hours, till they had decided in their mysterious councils what hollow tree in the forest they would make for.

But they were not to leave man's control. Carl climbed a little way into the tree, then, leaning far out, slipped the tin pail close under the swarm and shook the branch smartly. With a thump the whole mass dropped into the pail, not a bee flying. They seethed and flowed like molasses, while Carl hastily jumped down, ran to the hive he had prepared, and poured them down at its entrance.

They began to crawl in at once, and among the rest Alice caught sight of the queen just entering the hive with a mass of bees. This meant definite possession being taken. Immediately the bees spread over the entrance-board began to "fan." The swarm was safely hived.

A new swarm usually works with great vigor,

knowing that it has a great deal of time to make up, and this one might be expected to finish the super. The parent colony was now out of action; but it would hatch out a new queen in a week, and would build up strong again before fall.

"We must really do something to keep swarming down," said Alice, anxiously. "Of course, we want to increase our bees, but if the colonies break up now, it will cut our honey crop in two. And we *must* get the honey."

"Nothing to do, then, but to go all through them and see if any more are starting queen-cells," replied Carl. "It 's rather a big job, though, and I wish Bob were here to help us."

However, it was not necessary to tear all the hives open. Some, they knew, were too weak to think of swarming. With others it was sufficient to glance at the entrance and into the super to make sure of the steady, contented activity. About twenty they went through thoroughly, and in five of them they found the beginnings of queen-cells—an acorn-shaped cup, with an almost microscopic larvæ in it surrounded by royal jelly.

These they tore down at once, and marked the hives for close watching in future.

Next morning they continued this inspection, and three swarms came out while they were at work. One of them settled in the top of such a high tree that it could not be reached. They had to let it stay, and late that afternoon it took wing again and made off, across the woods, out of sight.

The others they hived successfully, and they made all possible haste to look through all the suspicious colonies for signs of swarming. Despite all efforts, however, the bees seemed to be getting ahead of them, and they were working frantically when a voice hailed them from the direction of the river:

"Hello, busy bees!"

Bob was coming up through the willows from the direction of the river, and, dropping everything, they rushed to meet him in delight and astonishment.

"How in the world did you get here? Where 's your wagon? You did n't walk?" cried Carl.

Bob waved his hand triumphantly toward the river. He had come from Morton by water, in

a second-hand boat that he had bought cheaply in the village. It was not beautiful; it was a home-made affair, which could be poled, paddled, or rowed, or perhaps sailed too. It was old and rough and needed painting badly, but it was water-tight and had cost only nine dollars. Alice was enchanted; a boat was what she had been longing for most of all.

Bob had had rather a hard up-stream pull, for he brought quite a cargo with him besides his trunk—potatoes, dried apples, prunes, butter, flour, and two more cases of bee-supplies.

"And here 're your queens," he added, taking a package from his pocket.

There were seven mailing-cages, six tied in one parcel, and the other, containing the three-dollar breeding queen, by itself. Carl looked through the wire gauze cover at this valuable insect, surrounded by her attendants.

"She does n't look any bigger or better than the rest of them," he complained.

"Wait till we see how she performs," said Alice, hopefully.

The mailing-cages were small, hollowed-out

wooden blocks, covered on one side with wire cloth; each contained an Italian queen, with half a dozen attendant bees, that had traveled all the way in the mail-bags from Tennessee. One small compartment in each cage was filled with soft candy, and most of this had been eaten on the journey.

As these queens had already been too long confined, Alice at once made preparations for introducing them—a matter of no small difficulty. For a colony of bees, even if deprived of their queen, will not easily accept a strange one. They prefer the more lengthy plan of raising a batch of queen-cells, and will kill any new queen put into the hive. Sometimes, however, they can be thrown into a panic by smoking and beating on the hive, and the new queen slipped in while they are too demoralized to notice her. The more common plan, however, is the one that Alice adopted.

She had already selected seven colonies where the queens appeared to be laying badly, and she now searched these queens out and killed them. Tearing off a strip of pasteboard on one end of

a mailing-cage, she revealed a small hole plugged with soft honey-candy; then she pushed the cage into the hive, down between the combs. The bees would at once eat out the candy, thus opening the hole and releasing the queen, and the sweet would put them in a good humor, so that they would be likely to accept her without trouble.

All but one of the seven were safely introduced. The seventh was found next morning dead in front of the hive where the bees had thrown her body out. Luckily it was not the three-dollar queen.

Late that afternoon it rained a little, and the next day was hot and muggy. It was perhaps the best honey day of the whole season. The bees were almost frantic over the abundance of sweet. The apiary roared like a huge mill. Carl, who had gone fishing, declared that he could hear it a quarter of a mile away. Long after dark the apiary still roared sonorously from every hive, where the bees were fanning furiously with their wings, driving currents of air between the combs to ripen the fresh honey. Bob looked into the supers after flying had ceased, and reported

that many of the combs were entirely full of sparkling honey, clear as water. Of course, it was still unripe and unsealed, and would need the care of the bees for some time before taking on the rich, thick consistency of finished honey, ready to be sealed.

For the time being the apiarists had checked the swarming and had a few days of leisure. Now and again a swarm did come out despite all precaution, but they caught nearly all of these, so that there was a fresh row of new colonies being built up.

Then a succession of chilly days cut the honey-flow short. The bees turned sulky and cross. It was impossible to go among the hives without being stung, but after the third day honey began to come in slowly once more.

Strawberries were now ripe, and could be picked in the greatest profusion. Alice gathered them daily; so did the boys, and in fact for a few days they ate hardly anything else. Alice longed to make jam, but had no jam-pots.

Carl went out one morning to pick berries, but returned within an hour, looking disturbed. In

one hand he held his half-filled pail, and in the other a rusty tin pan.

"What do you think of this, Bob?" he demanded.

The pan was half full of some dark fluid, at which his brother sniffed carefully.

"Maple syrup," he pronounced.

"Yes, and something else. See that green sediment? That 's Paris green. I found the pan under the bushes, just beyond the hives."

"Poison!" cried Alice. "Why, it must have been meant to kill the bees!"

"I guess Mr. Larue was trying to get revenge for his sore leg," said Carl, grimly. "This must have been laid some days ago, for there 's rain-water in it. Luckily the bees won't touch any other sweet when they 're getting honey."

In his first wrath, Bob declared that he would take his gun, go down to the squatter's cabin, and accuse him of the trick; but their calmer judgment decided that it was best to let the matter pass unnoticed. So it would probably have passed, but for a chance encounter of Carl's a few days later.

He was going through the woods with his shotgun, and came upon a trout brook about a mile from the cabin—a stream well known to him, though he seldom fished there. He was quietly following up the bank when he perceived Larue a few yards in front of him. The squatter was smoking a clay pipe and angling industriously with a short rod. A double-barrelled shotgun stood against a tree behind him.

They sighted each other almost simultaneously, and for a moment stared at one another in surprise and distrust.

"W'at you want?" said the half-breed. "You try to creep up on me, eh?"

"I did n't know you were here," said Carl. "But, look here, you 'd better not try to kill any more of our bees."

"Keel your bees? Don't know w'at you mean."

"Yes, you do. I found the poison you put out. You could be arrested for that—"

"You have me arrest! Why, I keel you first!" cried Larue.

"Don't try it. And you keep away from our

camp in future. When we hear anything after dark we 're as likely as not to shoot."

Carl held his gun ready, for he half-expected Larue to attack him. But the squatter did not reach for his weapon; he only assailed Carl with such abuse in mixed French and English that the boy almost lost his temper. He half raised his gun, and then, as good sense came back to him, lowered it quickly.

"We don't want any trouble with you," he said, trying to speak coolly. "If we do have any, it 'll be your own fault. But you keep away from our place. Now I 've warned you."

He stepped back into the cedars and walked away, his ears alert for any suspicious sound behind him. But as he cooled down he felt that he had acted most injudiciously; and he felt, in fact, so annoyed with himself that he determined not to mention the matter when he got home.

It took him some time, however, to calm his irritation to this extent, and meanwhile he walked rapidly and rather aimlessly through the woods toward the northwest. He was thinking of anything but his directions, when he came upon the

remains of an old road, probably a disused timber-road that might lead to Morton. Following this for a couple of hundred yards, he came in sight of a little lake that he had never seen before.

It was about two miles wide and contained one small, rocky islet. Fire and storm seemed to have swept the shores, for they were covered for more than a hundred yards from the water with tangled dead wood, ricks of underbrush, sprouting second growths, and raspberry canes everywhere. In fact there seemed to be square miles of wild raspberry around the lake. It was covered with bloom, but not a bee did he see. There was no necessity for their bees to travel so far as this to find all the raspberry bloom they wanted.

"What a magnificent spot for an apiary!" Carl reflected, as he gazed about him.

In addition to the raspberries, Carl noticed on a little rise of ground near him, a whole grove of large basswood trees. It was too early for their bloom, but he was going over to inspect them when something seemed to strike him heavily on the head.

The boy dropped in his tracks, and probably for several minutes he lay unconscious. He came to himself feeling dazed and sick, with a dim idea that some one had clubbed him. His mind turned to Larue, as he got weakly to his feet, but no one was anywhere in sight. His hat lay on the ground. He recovered it, and was startled to see two small holes through the crown. At the same time he became aware that blood was running down his forehead.

It flashed upon him that he had been shot and shot through the head! He turned sick and faint at the idea and wondered how he came to be still alive. He hardly dared to put his hand to his head, fearing to find a gaping cavity, but he could not feel exactly what he could call a wound, though there was a very sore spot on the top of his skull. He raked away a good deal of loose hair, and blood was trickling down freely.

He was somewhat reassured at finding the wound was not going to be immediately fatal. Looking at the holes in his hat, he saw that they must have been made by a small-caliber, high-powered, rifle bullet, and this exonerated Larue,

for it was a shotgun that the squatter had been carrying. Carl had heard no report; very likely the shot had been fired by some sportsman at a mile distance, perhaps on the other side of the lake. Missing its proper mark, the bullet had driven on till Carl had had the misfortune to come in its way.

He made his way down to the lake and contrived a cold compress on his head with his handkerchief, and began to think of making his way home. He was so dazed, still, that he entirely forgot the old lumber road by which he had come in, and started through the woods in what seemed to be the direction of the cabin.

He felt very weak and sick when he attempted to walk, but he kept going for a long time, till he came out upon a wide, half-burned strip, choked with wild-raspberry vines. A rapid, shallow brook hurried down the middle of the opening.

He had never seen this place before that he could remember, and suddenly it seemed to him that all his directions had gone suddenly wrong. He had not the slightest idea in which direction the cabin lay.

At this moment it occurred to him that he had a pocket compass. He consulted it, tried to think out his position, but his head ached too violently for any mental effort. However, he set out again in a new direction, and, after half an hour's unsteady walking, came into another raspberry slash—which he presently recognized as the same one he had passed before.

At this new horror added to his pain and weakness, his strength failed entirely. He fell among the flowering canes and lay there for a long time, partly in a sort of stupor, partly in dull anger against the stupid recklessness of men who go into the woods with rifles having an effective range of two miles.

He was parched with thirst and fever, but could hardly summon energy enough to crawl down to the stream. Finally he accomplished it, drank, and dipped his head in the water, and felt refreshed. He was able to think more clearly.

He had his compass; he knew the directions, but he could form no sort of idea whether the cabin lay north, south, east, or west. He could not remember definitely in which direction he had

traveled after meeting Larue, and his wanderings since that time had completely confused him.

As he lay there he heard the murmur of bees among the raspberry blossoms. They were probably his own bees, he reflected dimly, and he envied them their wings and their instinct that led them straight home across the forest. And then it struck him that he could not possibly be more than two miles from home, or the bees would not be working there in such numbers.

He thought he saw a chance of help. A laden bee flies home in a proverbially straight line. He watched the insects as they crawled over the blossoms and finally rose laden into the air. They circled, rising in spirals, and then darted across the open space and over the tree-tops. It was easy to follow the black specks for some distance against the blue sky.

Carl sighted their course carefully with the compass took another drink at the stream, and set off on their trail. It was a painful tramp. His head ached excruciatingly, and when by accident he tripped or stumbled, the jar left him weak almost to fainting. A dozen times he sat

down to rest and almost despaired of getting anywhere.

It seemed to him that he had walked miles when he came to another raspberry thicket, and here he found the guiding bees again. Again he sighted their course, and they took the same homeward direction as the first had done.

Clearly he was on the right track and, somewhat encouraged, he forced himself ahead again. But in less than fifteen minutes he came out upon the shore of a rapid river.

Here was an obstacle. The stream was fully sixty feet wide and looked deep. Carl wondered how so large a river had existed in the neighborhood, without their having seen it, and began to have doubts as to his course after all. Perhaps these were merely wild bees from some hollow tree. However, he was determined to follow them home. They were crossing the river, and he would have to cross it. He picked up a long, dry cedar pole for a float in case he went out of his depth, and waded in.

Halfway across he stepped into a deep hole, and was immediately carried off his feet by the force

of the current. Then he had reason to bless his pole, for it saved him from drowning, though he was rolled over and over and half choked. He managed to recover his footing and scrambled ashore—but on the same side of the river as before.

He was more dazed than ever by the ducking, and he started down the bank to look for a better place to cross. Bees were going over his head in great numbers. The roar was tremendous, and now he noticed that they were crossing the river in both directions, coming and going.

Perhaps, he thought, he was on the right side after all, and he stumbled on for another hundred yards. He encountered a beaten path, followed it, and the woods opened into a clearing. All at once the noise of the bees rose prodigiously, and like a flash the whole landscape turned familiar.

It was home. He saw the roof of the cabin. The bees had led him straight after all. His strength almost failed him in this last lap, but Bob saw him coming and rushed anxiously to meet him.

"What 's the matter?" he cried as he ran up.

"I 've been shot," Carl muttered. "Plumb through the head."

And then he collapsed, so that Bob had to call Alice for help and carry him into the house.

He recovered when they were sponging his head and cutting away the hair to get at his wound. The blood had caked and had stopped its bleeding. It must have looked gruesome, for he heard Alice and Bob discussing how they could get a doctor.

"I don't know that it 's so bad, after all," said Bob, after more of Carl's crown had been washed clean, and after a little more examination he began to laugh.

"Get up!" he said. "You 're not hurt. It 's only a graze, hardly deep enough to draw blood!"

Carl looked astonished and foolish. Alice, who had been pale, but collected, gave Bob a reproachful look, sat down suddenly, and began to cry a little.

"Just a little m-more, though, and he would have been k-killed!" she stammered.

"Yes," said Bob, more seriously, "half an inch

lower, and that bullet might have done for you. How did it happen? Who could have shot at you?"

Carl gave an account of his adventure. As soon as he learned that his deadly wound was only a scratch he felt remarkably better. A good part of his collapse must have been due to pure mental effect. But it was not all imaginary; the graze of a high-powered bullet upon the top of the head was stunning enough, and when he tried to get up he found himself still weak and staggery.

"But I 've found a superb place for another bee-yard," he told them. "I don't think it 's more than three miles from here, and there 's enough raspberry and basswood there for the bees to work themselves to death. It would be a gold mine to us. We ought to move half the bees over there at once."

CHAPTER V

FAILING HOPES

NEXT day Carl was still feeling unsteady and ill, but on the following morning he felt well enough to guide Bob to the new apiary site, and the two boys went off together. They returned full of enthusiasm.

"There must be half a square mile of basswood trees," said Bob. "So we 'd have a double chance, if the berries failed."

"Yes, and the best is that there 's a road going to the place," Carl added. "The old lumber road I told you about. It comes out on the road to Morton, a mile or so from here. It would only need a day or two with an ax to clear it out for a wagon to pass."

"This yard is certainly getting crowded," said Alice, thoughtfully. "With all the new swarms, we 'll have over two hundred colonies soon, and a hundred is as many as most locations will sup-

port. But what about the expense of moving? It would cost six dollars a day to get a team from Morton, and we 'd have to build a honey-house there, too."

"I believe it would pay us even if it cost a hundred dollars," said Carl. "But I suppose we can't do anything till some one goes to Morton and gets Mr. Farr's permission to move them. The mortgage says they 're not to be moved without permission."

This was undoubtedly the case, and, as none of them had time to go to the village just then, the matter was dropped temporarily. But new events speedily made it a live issue again.

A little warm rain fell in the afternoon, and next morning the honey-flow, which had been failing, began again profusely. And then, suddenly, a riot of swarming broke out among the bees.

A slow, light honey-flow always induces more swarming than a heavy one, and Alice had been nervous about the matter for some days. On this morning she went out with Carl to examine a few of the hives, and in the very first they found what they had feared to find—a cluster of the

peanut-shaped queen-cells. They were not quite sealed, but would have been finished the next day, and the colony would have swarmed.

Carl cut them all out. This treatment usually delays swarming at any rate for a week, till the colony can raise a fresh batch of cells. But occasionally, when they have the swarming fever badly, they will swarm, cells or not, and it is, moreover, very difficult to make sure of destroying every cell on ten combs swarming with bees.

The next colony had three heavy supers of honey piled on top of the brood-chamber, and when they got down to it at last they found no signs of swarming. But the third colony had cells just started.

Growing uneasy, they went to look at the hive where the three-dollar queen had been placed. They could not afford to let that queen lead her bees away to the woods, but there was not much danger of it, for a queen less than a year old seldom swarms.

But on opening the hive they found the brood-combs choked with honey, few eggs laid, and swarming cells well under way.

"Why, this queen must be no good!" exclaimed Carl.

"No, it is n't that," replied Alice. "But a queen never lays well just after she 's come out of the mailing-cage, and the bees have got ahead of her and filled up the combs with honey where the brood should be. The poor queen has no room left to lay in; she feels crowded and that 's what gave them the idea of swarming."

It was lucky they had discovered it in time. They cut out the incipient queen-cells, gave empty combs, and felt sure that they had made the colony safe. They were just proceeding to another of the colonies where one of the new queens was, when, with a loud roaring, a storm of bees began to volley out of a hive at the farthest end of the yard.

They surged about wildly in the air for some time, and then settled in a cluster on the tip of a small cedar where swarms had alighted several times before. Alice kept an eye on them, while Carl hurried off to the barn for fresh hives.

Before he could get back another swarm roared out of a second hive, eddied about like a cloud of

smoke, and finally settled. And then a third hive swarmed.

When bees are in the mood for it, the flying of a single swarm will sometimes start a perfect uproar of swarming throughout an apiary, and colonies will become carried away by the excitement and swarm without being normally ready for it. That seemed to be the case this time. Bob came running out to help, but a fourth swarm was already in the air. Then came two more, which united and settled in one enormous cluster, the size of a large bucket. Bees fairly darkened the air; the apiarists lost track of how many swarms were out or where they came from, and the noise was like a small tornado.

The three rushed about frantically, gathering up such clustered swarms as they could most easily reach, and Bob was instructed to dash a dipperful of water right into the top of every colony that might be likely to abscond. Such a drenching is an effectual check to swarming for that day at any rate and does the bees no harm.

This vigorous treatment produced some quiet. No more swarms had emerged for about fifteen

minutes, when the familiar crescendo roar sounded again, and Bob uttered a despairing yell, From the three-dollar queen's colony the bees were pouring out like steam from an escape-valve.

"Oh! don't let them go!" shrieked Alice.

Bob rushed up and dashed water into the entrance; Carl poured in a volume of smoke, but nothing could stop them. There was already an enormous cloud of bees circling over the hive, and the only thing now was to wait till they had clustered. But they did not seem inclined to cluster. The swarm drifted about uncertainly, here and there, now high, now low, and finally began to edge toward the river.

Expecting that they would settle on the willows by the water, the three apiarists followed it anxiously. But it did not settle. It went over the trees, and out above the stream.

"They're going across! They're making straight for the woods!" cried Alice. "That queen is lost!"

"No, they'll surely cluster a little further on," Bob exclaimed. "I'm going to follow them up. We can't lose that queen. I'll bring them back."

He snatched up a grain sack that they had already been using in collecting swarms, jumped into the boat and rowed himself across the river.

The runaways did not travel very fast, and he could see the swarm gyrating and drifting like a cloud of smoke over the trees. But it moved too fast for him to keep up with it over that rough ground. He kept it in sight for nearly a quarter of a mile, and then it faded like mist into the sky.

It might be that the bees had already selected some hollow tree for their new home, and had gone straight to it without clustering. This sometimes happens, but very rarely; a swarm almost always settles and hangs for some time, probably as a means of getting its force together, ready for the final journey, and Bob felt sure that this swarm would sooner or later settle on a branch.

He kept on, therefore, scrutinizing the trees carefully for a pendant brown bunch. No such thing appeared, and though he stopped and listened at every few rods he did not hear the humming drone that a swarm keeps up for some time after it has settled.

He lost count of distance, stumbling along with his eyes in the air, but he must have gone a mile from the apiary when he was stopped by a savage, guttural grunt, apparently close by. Just ahead of him was a dense clump of willows and alders fringing a small stream, and as he gazed, he thought he saw the dim outline of an animal through the shrubbery, something large and tall like a buck.

Anxious to get a look, Bob edged sideways and parted the willows a little. He was thunderstruck to see a bull moose standing in the shallow water and glaring at him.

Now he remembered having heard at Morton that moose had lately been seen in this district. At one time they were plentiful; then for years they had vanished, and were only beginning to reappear as they strayed south from the great game-preserves to the north.

At most times of the year they are exceedingly shy and timid animals, hard to get in view. Bob was amazed that this one had let him come up so close, and he was edging forward to get a better look through the tangle of under brush in

front of him when the animal charged at him furiously.

He jumped aside, found himself near a low-branched cedar, and scrambled up it. He had just time to draw his legs out of reach when the moose crashed into the tree with a force that jarred it to the roots.

When Bob recovered his breath he had time to feel astonished and indignant at this unprovoked attack. Bull moose are sometimes dangerous in the rutting season of autumn, but never in early summer, and the horns of this one had not yet quite outgrown their "velvet."

But he was clearly in a murderous temper. He stamped, tore up the earth and brushes around the cedar, gritted his teeth, and cocked his eye upward at the bee-keeper with a baleful glare. Then, all at once, Bob saw what was the matter.

The lower part of the bull's right shoulder was mangled and torn with wounds that were evidently not more than a day or two old. They might have been made by the claws of a bear; more likely by a charge of buckshot. Anyhow, they were enough to account for a good deal

of bad temper, for they must have caused intense pain.

But the bull's hostility did not seem to last long. Bob was looking upwards to see if he could climb higher in his tree, and when he glanced down again the space beneath him was empty. The moose had slipped silently away into the woods.

Whether he had really fled or was merely hiding in a near-by thicket Bob could not tell. He hesitated to come down, and for some minutes he sat dubiously in the branches, looking carefully about him for the enemy. Then something caught his eye that gave him a joyful surprise.

About twenty yards away there was a great brownish lump clustered at the tip of a low maple sapling, which bent slightly under the weight. Bob stared at it intently. It was certainly a swarm of bees. It could hardly be any other than the one he was chasing. If it had not been for the bull moose he might not have seen them, for they were aside from the straight line, and so near the ground that an elevated post was needed to distinguish them.

He was desperately anxious to secure them

now, for there was no telling when they might take wing again. He waited for some ten minutes very impatiently. No sign nor sound came from the moose, and Bob slid to earth and hastened toward the little maple.

The little tree had sagged over so that the swarm hung no higher than his shoulders, and it could be captured in the neatest possible manner. He carefully slipped the mouth of his sack over the swarm till the whole cluster was inside. Then he gathered the sack around the branch they hung by, and shook it violently. There was a sudden roar, and a heavy weight dropped into the sack. He had secured all the swarm, except for a few bees that flew about in wild dismay at this disappearance of their comrades.

Much elated, Bob turned back toward home. The sack hummed and stirred with the efforts of the angry insects to get out. But he had hardly gone ten yards when something stirred in the underbrush. He stopped, startled. The next instant a fearful bellow filled his ears, and the wounded bull burst through a curtain of evergreens.

Bob turned and ran as fast as he could, still clinging to the sack. Luckily the bull was somewhat lame from his wound and not in his regular racing form. At is was, Bob was almost run down; he saved himself only by leaping aside and changing his direction. All the time he kept on the lookout for a tree that he could climb, and he clung tightly to the sack. He was determined not to drop it except as a last resort, for the mouth was not tied, and the bees would escape at once.

The hoofs of the bull clattered behind him. He dodged wildly again, swerved behind a tree, and caught sight of a dead hemlock trunk that was spiked with short branches, and leaned at a decided angle.

It was almost as easy to climb as a ladder, and Bob scrambled up to safety, still carrying his swarm.

The bull's disappointed fury was now uncontrollable. He roared frightfully; his black mane stood stiffly on end, and he gritted and gnashed his teeth. Probably by this time he had got Bob thoroughly associated with the pain that he

was suffering, and it was too much for him to be twice checked in his revenge.

He reared up with his fore feet against the trunk of the hemlock. Then he drew back a few yards and charged into it with such force that, to Bob's horror, it gave slightly and leaned even farther over than before. Evidently the roots were rotten and held insecurely. It was no place of safety after all.

Again the bull crashed into the trunk, and this time, with an ominous creaking, it went over more than a foot.

This result seemed to encourage the bull greatly. He rammed his head against the trunk and pushed hard. Bob heard the rotten roots snapping. Pausing now and again to glance up at Bob with what seemed a gleam of savage triumph in his eye, the bull continued to butt and push.

Bob clung in his tree panic-stricken, while it swayed over farther and farther. In a few seconds he would surely be hurled under the brute's hoofs. Then it flashed upon him that he had one weapon left, and a terrible one. He disliked to

use it, even to save his life, but another charge of the bull, and a heavy lurch of the almost uprooted tree convinced him that he must not hesitate.

He held the sack directly over the bull's head, and shook out the swarm. At the same time he ducked quickly, and snatched his coat up to cover his own face.

There was a hissing roar as though from a burst steam-pipe, and he felt a dozen burning stings on his hands. Then he heard a sudden, astonished snort from the bull and a sound of furious trampling.

He ventured to peep through an opening in his coat. The air round him was full of bees, and the bull's face and head seemed covered with a surging brown mass. Thousands of bees were clinging and stinging pitilessly, while the animal rushed about, fiercely shaking its head and bellowing with pain and fury.

Blindly it started to bolt, and collided heavily with a tree. It made a fresh start and splashed into the brook. From the sounds it seemed to be rolling in the water. Probably it got rid of

some of its tormentors in this way, but certainly not of all. It dashed out of the creek, bolted past Bob's tree, knots of maddened bees still clinging to its hide, and crashed through the underbrush, straight away into the woods. There was no doubt that it was gone this time, for Bob could hear its smashing rush fully half a mile away.

Bob was stung a good deal himself, but this seemed a very light matter. He slipped to the ground and lost no time in finding a safer place, for the air was still full of savagely-excited bees. Here he remained for half an hour, picking the stings out of his skin, and waiting till he considered it safe to go home.

He might as well recover the sack, he thought, before he left, and he went to get it, regretting bitterly the loss of the swarm. No doubt it had saved his life; it could not be helped; but still it was a shame to lose Alice's three-dollar bee.

But as he approached his former perch he was surprised to find that the bees had collected again. Not all of them, indeed; instead of the big swarm, there was now only about a quart of bees in a little bunch on a cedar twig. But they would

hardly have gathered there if the queen had not been with them, and Bob bent over the cluster and looked at it closely.

They had got over their stinging fury now. He was able to scrutinize them carefully, and in a few seconds he made out the slender, graceful body of the yellow, Italian queen, as she crawled about among her bees. Full of delight, he slipped the sack over it, shook the bees off, and started hastily for home. More than half were lost, to be sure, but he would have sacrificed all the rest of the swarm to have saved the queen.

He reached the river without seeing anything more of the bull, ferried himself across, and went up to the apiary, where Carl and Alice were still working hard.

"I 've got 'em!" he cried triumphantly as he appeared.

"Got them!" his brother exclaimed. "Looks as if they 'd got you!"

Bob's face was indeed a shocking sight. A bee-keeper usually becomes hardened to stings, so that they do not cause swellings; but Bob had not yet become sufficiently inoculated. There were

big lumps on his forehead, one eye was nearly closed, his chin was lopsided, and both his hands were somewhat puffed. But he was highly elated at having recovered the swarm with the valuable queen, which they at once carefully restored to a hive.

"There, old lady!" said Carl, as he saw the yellow queen creep into the hive with her bees, "you 've had enough wild life now, and you 'd better settle down to business."

Bob gave them a brief account of what had happened, while he helped them sort out the swarms, but in the course of another hour his eye closed so badly that he was obliged to retire to the cabin. Several more swarms had come out while he had been gone, but all of them had been recovered, and by that night they had twenty-eight new colonies more than they had bought.

The apiary was certainly far too crowded, and doubtless there would be still more swarming before the season was over. Some of them ought to be moved to another spot, and the sooner this could be done the better.

The next day was hot and dry. No honey ap-

peared to be coming in, and no swarms went out, and early the following morning Carl paddled the boat down to Morton.

He had no difficulty in securing Mr. Farr's written consent to moving part of the bees to the new location by the lake. He ordered a two-horse team and hayrack to come out to the apiary the next day, and came home with a roll of wire gauze and several papers of tacks.

It took a day to clear away the bushes and brush from the old road, but it was ready when the wagon arrived from Morton, and they moved fifty colonies the next night, in two loads. The next morning they moved another load by daylight. It was hard, tedious work to load and unload the heavy hives, and the wagon had to move slowly all the way. It was dangerous work, too; though the entrances of the hives were closed with wire gauze, an aperture might develop through which the bees could rush out, and the result would probably be stung horses, a runaway, and a line of smashed hives scattered along the road. One of the boys walked with a lighted smoker beside the load all the way, on the watch for possi-

ble trouble, and they all breathed much more freely when the hives were off the wagon.

They set them on large stones a few rods back from the water. Later they could make regular stands for them, and before another season, of course, they would have to build a small house for extracting and storing the apparatus.

For the present they contented themselves with a tiny hut no bigger than a piano-case, built of rough logs, in which to store tools and a few frames, extra hives, and odds and ends. Most of the colonies in the new yard were old ones that had swarmed and were weak in bees. They would gather no more surplus honey and would need little attention this year, but would build up strong for the next season.

The day of the swarming riot was the last really good day of the raspberry bloom. The effect of the shower had been transient. The weather turned hot and dry. The honey dried up in the flowers, and the discouraged bees worked only for an hour or two early every morning.

"If it would only rain—really rain hard!" groaned Alice.

"Unless it does, the honey-flow is certainly at an end," said Carl, anxiously. "The berry bloom won't last long in this drought and I 'm certain there 's nothing like a thousand dollars' worth of honey in the supers now."

"No—or five hundred," added Bob.

In fact, the earliest raspberry blossoms were now replaced by green fruit. If rain should fall in time, the later bloom might last for a week more, and there was the basswood flowering still to come. But the weather remained hot and dry, and there was no dew at night. Alice's garden withered, though she watered it every evening. Twice clouds rolled up from the south, and they heard thunder. It must have rained within ten miles, but not a drop fell at the apiary.

"Even half an hour's shower would mean a couple of days' honey-flow," said Bob.

But it did not come. Now and again a little moisture in the air set the bees working for an hour or two, but most of the time they were idle. As usual in a honey dearth they became bad-tempered. Their owners could no longer stroll about among the hives with impunity. The bees came

into the cabin, attracted by one of the pails of candied honey, and would have carried every morsel of it away if they had been permitted. Robber bees were prowling about every hive, looking for a chance to steal a little sweet from some careless colony, but every entrance was alive with alert guards, and no bee was allowed to pass in without being examined and smelt all over. The robbers did get a foothold in one weak colony, however, and before the apiarists saw it, it was besieged by a cloud of bees. They carried it by assault, too, after half an hour's fighting, killed the defenders, tore down most of the combs, and carried every drop of the honey away to their own hive.

Then they turned their attention to the hive standing next in the row, but this was a powerful colony, and the raiders got more than they bargained for. In a moment the entrance was covered with knots of furiously-fighting bees. Every robber was pounced upon the moment it alighted. The attack was beaten off, and for a time quiet reigned in the yard.

Day by day the raspberry bloom vanished, and

no fresh buds were opening now. The time came at last when it was entirely gone, and all the thickets were covered with fruit. The basswood trees were full of buds—but would they yield nectar?

It was the middle of July. In two weeks they must pay five hundred dollars, with interest, and they did not have the money. Unless they could make it, the bees would be taken from them.

"If the basswood only yields as it should we 'll manage it, after all," said Bob, trying to be optimistic.

Alas! the basswood flowered in the midst of a hot wave, when the whole land lay baked and panting. The bloom lasted only a day or two, dried up, and withered. Scarcely a bee had touched the blossoms.

The Harmans felt unspeakably gloomy and discouraged. The failure of their hopes, after so much anticipation, labor, and experience, was hard to bear.

"We may as well look the thing square in the face, Allie," said Carl one morning, when he was alone with his sister in the cabin. "The season 's

over, and it 's a failure. I don't know how we 'll save the bees."

"Surely we 'll have money enough to pay Mr. Farr. We must save the bees if we starve ourselves, for they mean everything to us. How much money have we left?"

"About two hundred dollars. It has just melted away, with all the expenses of fresh supplies and sugar and then the cost of establishing the new yard, besides our own living."

"Well, surely we can get three hundred dollars' worth of honey, to make up enough for our payment. We can manage to live some way and rub along till another season comes."

"Well, that 's what I wanted to talk about," went on Carl, earnestly. "You see, Bob's university work must n't be interrupted on any account. He 'll want to drop it, I know, to save the money, but we must n't let him. We 've got to find the money somehow. Now, I 've been thinking that you might go back to Harman's Corners, where you could live in our old house for little or nothing, and I might get some kind of a job in Toronto."

"You 're right," Alice agreed. "Bob must keep up his work. But I would n't stay at home all alone. I 'd rather get a job in Toronto, too."

Then began a long discussion of plans, but they revealed nothing of all this to Bob. That very evening, however, Bob proposed that his sister take a walk with him.

"This investment has n't panned out, Alice," he said, when they were well away from the cabin. "We 're not going to make a cent profit this year. I blame myself for it, for I got you both into it."

"Nonsense, Bob!" returned Alice. "We were just as eager as you were. We all rushed into it, and we all knew that it was a gamble on the weather."

"Well, anyhow, I 'm not going back to college next term. Carl will want me to, I know, but you must back me up. I could n't use any money that way. We 'll be hard up at the best, and I won't have you two rob yourselves for my support."

"Oh, Bob! You must go back!"

"Well, I won't. What 's a year lost, anyhow. But I 'm uncertain what to do. I could come up

here and trap all winter. I 'm sure I could make several hundred dollars, all clear profit; but trapping is a sort of gamble, too. Or I could get a job any time with the Toronto Electric Company at about fifteen a week. Trapping would be more fun, but the other would be surer, and I 'd get a lot of practical experience. What do you think?"

"I don't know!" said Alice, half laughing and half crying. "Oh, I don't know, Bob. I think— I think we 'd better harvest our honey first and see how it turns out."

And the next day they began to harvest the crop.

CHAPTER VI

ROBBING THE ROBBER

IT was the comb honey in the one-pound sections on which they were depending for an early sale at a fancy price, and naturally they wished to take this off first. The only place to pile and sort it was in the cabin, and they proceeded to turn the boys' bedroom into a storehouse. There was no furniture to take out; they merely removed the bedding, and laid boards over the bunk to make a platform. Carl nailed wire gauze over the window, and Bob constructed a rough screen for the outer door. With the bees in that fierce robbing humor the place must, above all things, be kept bee-tight.

It was a ticklish task to take off the supers, for the bees were intensely irritable, and a hive was no more than opened when a host of robbers collected, eager to pilfer a mouthful. The boys had to be quick in their movements. Bob opened the

hive, and the moment the lid was up Carl drove great blasts of smoke into the super, at the same time keeping enough smoke in the surrounding air to repel the thieves. Bob then seized the super, knocked it on the ground to jar out the few bees left in it, and hurried with it to the cabin.

In the storeroom Alice was waiting to sort and grade the honey. The delicate sections were glued fast in the frames that held them, and had to be pried carefully out. The very finest sections, sealed white and smooth all over, were classed as "Fancy"; those of slightly rougher appearance ranked as "No. 1." A certain number of the rest might be saleable at a low price; the honey was just as good as the "Fancy," but their appearance was against them. But the larger part was worth nothing, except for the honey that could be obtained by the extractor.

From the first it became apparent that there was going to be more honey than they had expected, and their hopes began to go nervously upward. When the opening of a hive showed a good super, with all its combs smooth and white, the boys chuckled, and Bob exulted in its weight

as he lugged it into the house. Some colonies had as many as three supers like this, but many had only one or two, and some, where the colony had swarmed, only a worthless and unfinished set of combs.

Beside these, there were the extracting supers, containing a good deal of honey, but they did not intend to extract at once. The comb honey came first.

The piles of supers accumulated in the little room faster than Alice could remove the sections. With rising hope, the boys worked feverishly, and shortly after noon they carried in the last super. Then they set to work to assist Alice at the sorting and grading.

Every section had to be looked at and estimated, the propolis and wax scraped from the wood, and then placed carefully in the shipping-cases. The emptied supers were put outdoors; the supers with unfinished sections were set by themselves. All three worked hard that afternoon, and much of the next day, but it was not till nearly supper-time that they emptied the last super, and filled the last shipping case.

There were 3840 sections. Of these, 1200 ranked as "Fancy," and about 600 as "No. 1." Nearly 2000 sections were unsaleable.

"These we can eat ourselves," remarked Alice.

"We ought to get $2.50 a dozen for the best, and $2 for the 'No. 1'," Bob estimated. "That comes to—"

"$350," said Carl, who was a lightning calculator. "Why, that 's not so bad! Then all those unsaleable sections must have at least a thousand pounds of honey in them that we can extract. Besides, there must be three or four hundred dollars' worth of extracted honey on the hives which we 'll be able to sell later."

"Hurrah!" shouted Bob. "We 'll pull through, after all."

"Yes, and with something to the good!" cried Alice.

In their relief and joy they joined hands and performed a wild dance around the shipping cases. It did not last long, though, for they were tired and stiff with bending over the supers; they were gummy with propolis and wax, and sticky with honey, and on the window was a cluster of bees

the size of a small swarm, which had been carried in with the honey. After dark Carl brushed them off into a bucket, carried them out, and poured them down in front of a weak hive. They crawled gladly in, and as they all had their sacs full of honey, they were admitted. A honey-laden bee is always welcome to any hive.

The comb honey had to be sold at once, for the time was growing short. Bob proposed that he should go over to Morton and make the sale in Toronto by telegraph, or by long-distance telephone if he could get connections. It was a good plan, but Carl was anxious to be on hand to hear how the negotiations went; Alice was no less eager, and was, moreover, unwilling to be left alone at the cabin, so it ended in preparations for all of them to go to Morton and make the deal together.

"Above all things, we must be careful to leave the cabin bee-tight," Alice warned them. "Just fancy the bees finding a way in. They 'd carry all that honey back to the hives before we got home."

So they plugged every chink in the logs most carefully with wet clay and moss, looked to the wire screens, and even blocked up the chimney. The cabin door they fastened with a big padlock and chain, and Alice packed up half a dozen of the best sections for a gift to Mr. Farr.

"No use trying to sweeten him," Bob warned her. "He 'll take it, but he 'll be as hard as nails with us all the same. He keeps business and friendship separate, you know."

"Anyway I 'm going to take him the honey. I rather like him, you know," Alice persisted.

They went down in the boat, a slow and rather lazy drift with the current in the warm morning sunshine. About noon they reached Morton, and found that they could get telegraph connections at the railway station, and long-distance telephone at the hotel.

As a first step, Bob telegraphed to the headquarters of the Provincial Bee-keepers' Association to learn what the season had been throughout the country, and how prices were ranging. It was two o'clock in the afternoon before the reply

came; the waiting had been something of a strain, and Bob looked nervous when he ripped open the yellow envelope, but then his face brightened.

"Splendid! Listen to this!" he cried.

" 'Honey crop reported about one third normal throughout Ontario. Severe drought. Members advised to hold for good prices. Market firm.' "

"The drought must have been worse with them than it was with us," said Carl. "Well, prices are likely to go 'way up, and we ought to have a chance to make some money."

"It looks so," replied Bob, "and now I want you to let me do the negotiating. I 'm an ignoramus at handling bees, but I think I can sell honey better than either of you."

"Who 'll you sell it to?" asked Alice.

"I 'm going to try Mr. Brown, of Brown & Son, you know, the wholesale grocery people. We used to buy a lot of stock from him for the store. I 've often bought from him by long-distance, and I 'll see if I can't sell to him the same way. Anyhow, I think he 'll give us a square deal."

The telephone was not in a booth, but merely

attached to the wall of the hotel office. However, there was no one in sight or hearing at the time, and they might as well have been in a private room. Bob called the long-distance connection, and after about fifteen minutes' waiting got a reply from the Toronto grocery dealers. Alice and Carl stood beside him, and listened breathlessly to the conversation.

"Is that Mr. Brown?" cried Bob. "This is Bob Harman—of Harman's Corners, you know. No, I 'm not there just now. I 'm running a bee-ranch up north. A bee-ranch. Honey-bees, you know. Yes. Yes, we have a lot of splendid comb-honey. Are you in the market?"

For a moment he listened attentively.

"We have about a hundred dozen 'Fancy' and about fifty dozen 'No. 1,' " he continued. "We ask $3 and $2.50 a dozen for the two grades, freight paid to Toronto."

"What an awful price! We 'll never get it," whispered Alice, startled.

"Don't speak. You 'll shake his nerve," Carl muttered.

"No," Bob was saying into the transmitter.

"We would n't care to take much less. There 's been a bad crop everywhere, and honey is scarce this year. Oh, we could n't think of taking that. What 's that? All right. In an hour, then. Good-by." He turned away from the telephone.

"They actually had the nerve to offer $2.25 for the 'Fancy,' and $2 for the other," he said. "They said they had bought a lot of 'Fancy' at $2, but I think that was pure bluff. And I thought they were sure to give us a square deal! Well, I 'm to ring them up again in an hour, and if they won't come up to a decent figure, there are other dealers in Toronto."

It seemed a long time to wait. Alice carried her gift of honey to Mr. Farr, and came back reporting that he had seemed much pleased. But he had shaken his head grimly at her account of the poor season.

"The old skinflint need n't worry," said Carl, angrily. "He 'll get his money all right."

"Yes, but I 'm not going to sacrifice that honey," said Bob with decision. "It 's cost us too much—with cats and moose and stings and bears and wendigos. It ought to be worth a dollar a

pound. If we can't do well in Toronto, we 'll ring up Montreal. Honey prices are often better there."

They did not wait much beyond the hour in calling Mr. Brown again, and this time Bob got him with very little delay.

"Yes," he said in reply to some question, "I 've thought it over, and we can't possibly accept what you offer. We 'll shade the price to $2.80 for the best grade, but we think we should have at least $2.50 for the other. It 's really beautiful honey."

He listened a moment and frowned. "Hold the line a moment," he said at last. "I must consult my brother."

He turned to Carl and Alice, holding his hand over the transmitter, so that their conversation should not leak through to Toronto.

"He says his best figure is $2.60 and $2.30, cash down," he said in a low tone. "What shall we do?"

"Take it, by all means. That is n't so bad," said Carl, anxiously.

"Yes, take it—take it!" Alice begged. "We must n't lose the sale."

Bob looked at them thoughtfully for a moment, and then an expression of determination crossed his face. He turned back to the telephone.

"Sorry—can't do it!" he said, firmly. "We will take $2.70 and $2.40, but that 's positively our last word. We 're thinking of shipping to Montreal."

Alice turned pale, and clutched Bob's arm in remonstrance, but he paid no attention to her.

"No," he said into the telephone, "I 'm not trying to drive any hard bargain, Mr. Brown. But there 's scarcely any comb-honey this year, and prices are going up. Shall we ship? All right. That will be satisfactory. We can ship to-morrow or the day after. Good-by!"

He hung up the telephone and made a wild leap into the air.

"Victory!" he exclaimed. "We get $2.70 and $2.40, cash on delivery. About twenty cents a dozen more than we 'd counted on. It was the mention of Montreal that fetched them, for they were keen to get the honey. We 're saved!"

"Frenzied finance!" said Carl, who had been jotting down some figures on a scrap of paper.

"But it comes to $390, and with the $200 we 've got we 'll be able to make our payment all right. Let 's get that honey shipped at once."

First, however, they had to arrange for a teamster to go out to the apiary for the honey; then they had to make some purchases in the village, and when they had finished their errands, it was too late for the long pull up the river that afternoon. So they all stayed at the hotel and started up-stream at eight o'clock the next morning.

It was nearly noon when they arrived at the apiary landing, and they were tired, but lighthearted with success. They went up toward the cabin with their arms full of packages, and suddenly Alice, who was in front, uttered a sharp cry.

A cloud of robber bees hung roaring about the cabin. The door, which they had left locked, stood half open. They dropped their parcels and rushed up. The main room was swarming with bees, but fortunately the screen door into the honey room was shut, and they had not been able to get in, though they were trying hard.

But a glance through the wire showed that the honey had been pillaged. The piles of supers

were overturned; so were the stacks of full shipping cases, and half of them seemed to be gone.

Alice gave one glance through the door at the wreck and then dropped on a bench and hid her face in her hands. Bob rushed into the storeroom, with Carl at his heels.

A great part of the best honey was gone—nearly all the "No. 1" grade and some of the "Fancy." They could not tell accurately at the moment how much. More than a thousand pounds seemed to be missing, but the thief had abstained from taking any of the unsaleable sections.

"It can't have been gone long!" said Carl, excitedly. "Let 's see if there are any tracks."

As they hastened out they noticed that the heavy staple that held the padlock had been pried off. The ground near the door was too hard to show tracks, but a little way from the river they found footprints heading toward the cabin, and in the gravel along the shore they found the mark where a boat had been drawn up.

"Gone by water!" said Bob grimly. "Do you suppose it was that half-breed squatter?"

"There 's no one else living along the river within ten miles. He must have seen us all going down the river yesterday, and knew that he had a clear field. What fools we were to leave all that honey. We 're done for now!"

"Not much!" returned Bob. "If that fellow has the honey, we 'll get it back. Here, come along!"

He led the way rapidly back to the cabin, took down his rifle, and began to fill the magazine with cartridges. Carl picked up his shotgun.

"Bob! What are you going to do?" exclaimed Alice.

"Get that honey back," replied her brother shortly. "Going down the river."

"Well, if you 're going, I 'll go too and paddle the boat."

"No, you stay here, Allie. There won't be any shooting, but this is no girl's business. Stay here and get the bees out of here and things straightened up. We won't be long—I hope!"

Alice looked entreating and frightened, but Bob was immovable. Carrying their guns, the two boys went back to the boat and in another

minute were shooting down the stream as fast as the oars and current could take them. As they went they decided upon a plan of action. They did not want any collision with the half-breed. If it came to weapons, it would mean somebody killed or wounded, and that would be worse than losing the whole crop of honey. They only wanted to make sure that he had really stolen the honey, and where he had hidden it. Afterwards they would see about recovering it.

They landed near the great slough, left the boat, and went cautiously through the woods to the edge of the clearing. No one was in sight. No dog barked this time, and the cabin door was shut.

"Perhaps they 've gone away with the haul," muttered Bob. "The only way is to go up and find out."

So they marched boldly across the stumpy field to the cabin, and knocked.

"*Entrez!*" cried a voice from within, and Bob pushed open the door.

There was a startled exclamation from within. Larue rose from a seat where he was doing some-

"No, you stay here, Allie. There won't be any shooting, but this is no girl's business"

thing with a large piece of buckskin, and he looked black as he saw the two boys standing armed in the doorway. His wife, a tall, rather handsome and shabbily-dressed woman, stopped short in the middle of the floor, looking frightened. Two pretty, gipsy-like children slunk into the background.

"*Bon jour! bon jour!*" said both Bob and Carl politely.

"*Bon jour,*" responded the squatter, and his face softened a little. "What do you want? You speak French?"

"Only a little—not enough to talk," replied Bob. "Mr. Larue, our house was broken into while we were away, and about a thousand pounds of honey stolen—over $200 worth. We came to see if you knew anything about it."

"Me? How should I know anyt'ing about zat?" returned Larue.

It was hard to put the accusation direct, and Bob hesitated a little.

"The honey was taken away by boat. You have a boat, and you 're the only person that lives down this way, so—"

"You say I steal your honey?" cried the squatter angrily. "I tell you I know nottings about it. Look! Is the honey here?"

Carl and Bob both looked, and Bob sniffed as well, and sniffed again with suspicion. The cabin was all one large room, and a thousand pounds of honey certainly could not have been concealed in it. It contained only the simplest furniture, a dirty cooking stove, a table, two rough beds, on which were spread the two fine bearskins that Alice had seen, and a small cupboard. But Bob suddenly darted forward and picked up a small fragment of honeycomb from the floor under the table.

"Where did this come from?" he cried.

"Bee-tree," returned the half-breed, cunningly.

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Carl, examining the bit of wax. "This comb was built on foundation. It came from our bee-yard."

"Give us back our honey, and we 'll say nothing more about it," urged Bob. "You don't need to steal honey. We 'll give you all you can eat."

"Voila!" cried Larue. "I know nottings about your honey. It is that you want to make trouble.

You come here to see me; *bien,* you are welcome. You come here to insult me; you go outside quick."

"When we come back, we 'll bring a constable!" cried Carl.

The woman said a sentence to her husband in rapid French, which the boys failed to catch.

"Let your constable come," continued the squatter. "He find nottings. But as for you, you git out and stay out. I know nottings about your honey. *Va-t-en! Git!*"

"Come along! No use talking any more!" muttered Bob, and the boys departed, feeling rather beaten and angry. They crossed the clearing and paused to look back from the cover of the woods. Larue was standing in his doorway, gazing after them.

"All the same, I know the honey is somewhere about this place," Bob broke out. "Why, I could smell it. I could n't be mistaken. And that piece of comb—"

"It was certainly a piece of a section," Carl agreed. "I 'm afraid, though, that I made a bad break in threatening him with a constable. He 'll

be sure to move the plunder right away to some place where nobody could ever find it."

"He certainly has n't got it in his cabin. Maybe it 's stored in the barn."

"Likely enough. Or somewhere near here in the woods. How we 'll ever locate it is more than I can imagine."

"If it 's in any exposed place some bees will be likely to find it and rob it out for him. Wish they would!" said Bob.

Carl looked quickly at his brother and meditated in silence for a moment.

"Look here!" he exclaimed at last. "Why can't we send bees to scout for that honey. They might even carry it back, and no power on earth could stop them if they got going. Of course they could n't lug the sections home, but they 'd lick out all the honey and put it in their hives again, and we could extract it. That would be better than losing it all."

Bob looked dubious at first, and then he began to laugh.

"Robbing the robber!" he exclaimed. "I don't know but what it might work. Anyway, it 's a

brilliant idea and ought to be tried. None of those shipping cases had their tops closed, and the bees could get into them without any trouble. But how 'll we work it? It 's three miles from here to the bee-yard."

"Yes, we 'd have to bring some hives down here within range," replied Carl. "We could float them down in the boat. Four or five would do to see if they found the honey, and then we could bring more."

They got into their boat and pulled up-stream again. From a distance they saw Alice waiting at the landing, peering eagerly down the river.

"Thank goodness, you 're back!" she exclaimed fervently. "I 've been so worried. Did you have a fight? Did you find the honey?"

"Neither honey nor fight," returned Bob, as they went ashore. "But we think we know where the honey is, and we 're going to send some messengers after it to-morrow."

"Messengers? What do you mean?" cried Alice, mystified. Carl chuckled and outlined the plan to her, much to her amusement, though she was doubtful of its success.

"Why, there's a thousand pounds of honey missing," she said. "A colony can't carry more than ten pounds of honey a day. What a lot of colonies it would take, or what a long time, to have them bring all that back, even if they find it!"

However, the boys were determined to give the plan a trial, and as soon as it was dark they loaded half a dozen of their strongest colonies into the boat. Along with them they took supers of empty combs.

It crowded the boat considerably and made an awkward cargo, but they got it safely down the river. Landing near Larue's clearing, they put the hives ashore and then carried them, one by one, with much labor and stumbling, through the woods. Within two hundred yards of Larue's barn, but well back among the trees they set the hives down behind a cedar thicket. Bob then laid a trail of honey from the hives almost to the barn, sprinkling a little on the ground and leaves every few feet. Before he had quite reached the barn, the hound began to bay noisily, and the boys scuttled off to the river and paddled homeward.

About nine o'clock the next morning they made their way cautiously down to their ambushed "messengers" to see what was going on. They found things active. Bees were coming and going rapidly, dropping heavily laden in front of the hives. Every colony was alert, excited and bad-tempered. The intelligent insects knew well that honey was coming from some unnatural source. Robbing was in the air; they felt it, and every entrance was massed with guards in readiness for a possible attack.

"They 've found it!" exclaimed Carl, gleefully.

The boys sat down and watched. All the bees were certainly going straight toward Larue's clearing, and they came heavily back, dropping by scores at the hives, almost too heavy to fly. In the course of an hour the activity had greatly increased.

"Yes, they 've located it, all right," said Bob. "They 're heading toward his barn, it seems to me. I wish I dared go and look, but we 'd better be careful not to show our noses. Larue is probably on the watch."

They put on the supers of empty combs to give

storage room for the honey and went back to the cabin for dinner, laughing. But they were too much excited to stay long away from the ambushed hives, and they returned to them toward the middle of the afternoon. Alice was intensely anxious to be allowed to go with them, but the situation was highly delicate, and they decided that it was hardly safe.

When they came within a hundred yards of the hidden hives they heard the roar of the bees. Never before had they seen such a fury of work. A black belt, a river of bees, seemed to be flowing over the trees toward the clearing. The entrances were almost choked as the insects poured out and in, and the ground in front was covered with crawling bees that had dropped exhausted.

They were savagely cross, too, as bees always are when robbing is going on. There was fighting at the entrance of every hive, probably due to bees mistaking their doors in the new location. The whole front of the hive was brown with guards, and it was dangerous to go nearer than twenty feet. Bob had brought a veil with him, though, and he opened one of the supers. He

received several stings on the hands, but reported that the combs were nearly half full already, and not with nectar, but with thick, ripened honey.

"No doubt at all that it 's our honey coming back," he said. "I wonder what Mr. Larue thinks of all this. If we 're careful, he 'll never suspect that we had any hand in it. He 'll just take it as a kind of judgment for his thieving. But what oceans of bees seem to be going over. You would n't think that half a dozen hives could send out so many."

"I 've a notion that the bees from the home yard are coming here too," said Carl. "Just look in the air."

In fact, a long air-line of bees could be discerned going straight up the river above the trees. It was a long flight, of course, but bees have been known to go four or five miles when honey is scarce. Perhaps the home apiary might have found the stolen honey even if they had not moved any bees.

During that afternoon the excitement rose to a perfect frenzy. A torrent of bees swept overhead, from the ambushed hives to the clearing

and up the river toward home. The boys began to grow uneasy; as Carl had said, no power on earth could stop things now, and it looked rather as if they had unlocked forces that were too much for them. Carl hastened home to look at conditions there, and came back breathless, reporting the apiary in a turmoil. Bees were flying, robbing, fighting and bringing in honey. Many of the colonies had not yet learned where the honey was coming from, and were flying around the cabin in clouds, or trying to pounce on some weaker colony.

"But there must be over a million bees going to the Frenchman's place," he said. "I think we ought to try to find out what 's going on there. The whole family may be stung to death."

It did look dangerous, but they were greatly afraid to be seen. Larue's indignation must be well up to shooting-point before this. But they crept cautiously toward the clearing.

Before they reached the edge of the woods they could hear a roar like a distant cataract; and when they came into the open they were appalled at what they saw.

CHAPTER VII

REAPING THE HARVEST

A ROARING black cloud that looked almost like the vortex of a tornado swirled over the log barn. There was a smaller cloud hovering about the house, and the whole clearing was alive with bees, coming and going, looking for something, all extremely irritable.

Approaching the barn as closely as they dared, they saw that the whole building was like a vast beehive. The insects covered the logs; they swarmed in and out of every one of the wide chinks between the timbers. Myriads were continually emerging and flying off, and myriads more took their places.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Carl, looking rather wildly at his brother. "I did n't know we had so many bees. The honey 's here in the barn all right."

"It won't be here long, at this rate," returned Bob. "But I wonder what 's happened to Larue

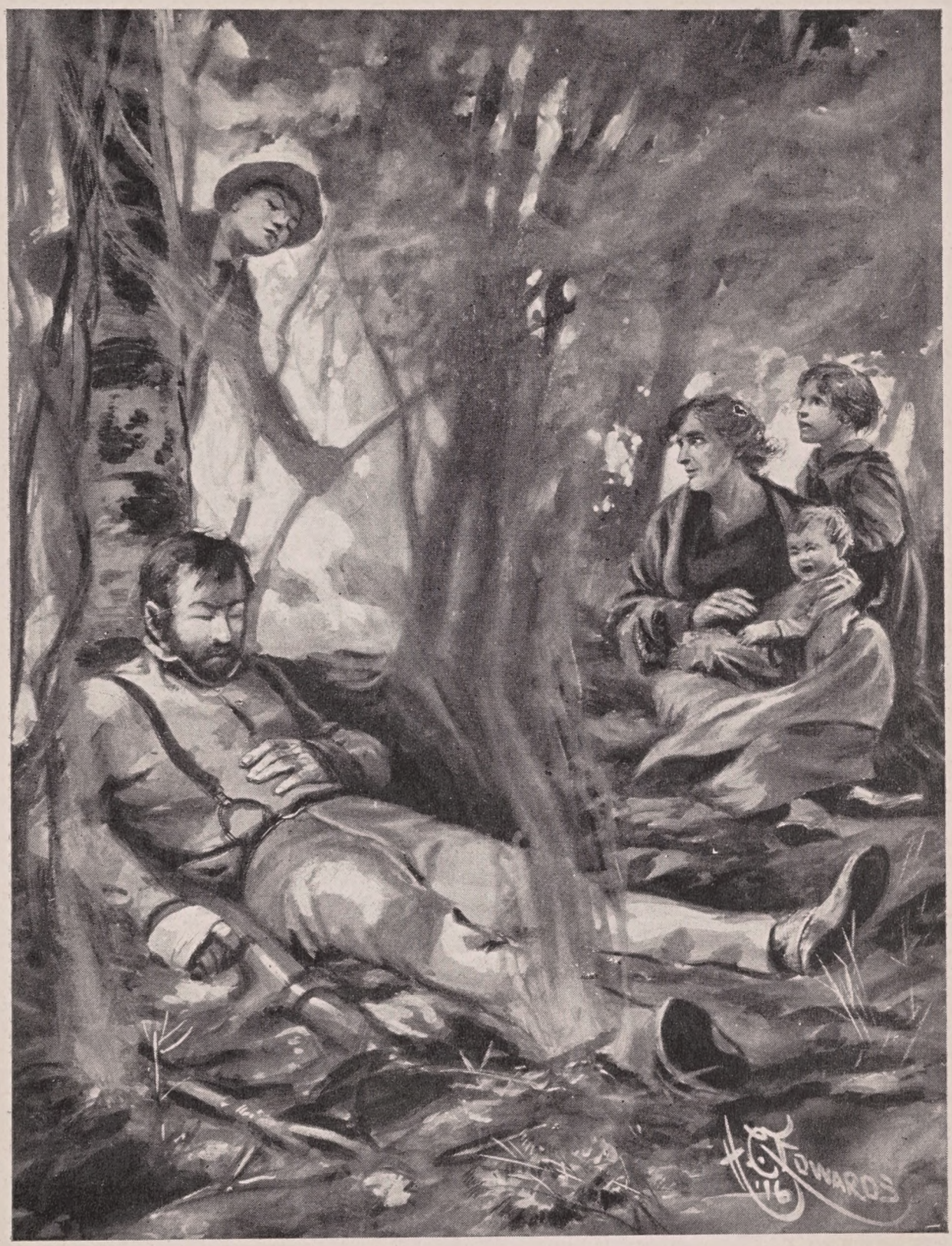
and his family and live stock. Perhaps they 're all dead!"

The boys really felt seriously uneasy at the overwhelming success of their scheme. Except for the bees, no living creature was in sight, but Carl presently spied a dead hen near the barn. Evidently she had been killed by the bees, and this increased their uneasiness. Bob made an attempt to reach the cabin, but a host of savage bees drove him back, despite his veil. The insects were fighting-mad.

The boys crept around the edge of the clearing, keeping in the shelter of the woods, where the bees did not molest them. They had made about half the circuit when they caught sight of a heavy cloud of smoke rising a little way back among the thickets.

"S-sh! There they are!" whispered Bob.

They lay low for a minute, then, hearing no sound, crept up close enough to gain a view of the camp. The squatter's family were sitting dejectedly in the shelter of smoke from a heavy smudge. Larue himself reclined against a tree, but he was hardly recognizable. Both his eyes seemed to be



He was plainly in no condition to show fight, and the boys advanced without hesitation

swollen shut. He had two big lumps on his forehead, his lips were puffed, and one ear was twice its rightful size. It was clear that he was in no fighting condition, and the boys walked up without any hesitation.

"You seem to be having trouble," said Bob innocently.

The squatter tried to screw his eyes open far enough to get a glimpse of them.

"Nom d'un nom!" he ejaculated, thickly through his swollen lips. "Dose bees! Dey come—dey swarm—!" and he trailed off into a mixture of French and English indistinguishably distorted in his puffy mouth. They could hardly make out a word.

"What 's been happening, Mrs. Larue?" said Carl, turning to the woman. She also bore marks of stings, and so did the two children.

"Your bees!" she cried. "Dey come in by t'ousands—millions! We stay in de house—no! *Pas possible!* Dey kill my two best *poulets.* Kill us too, if we not get out!"

"What do you suppose they could have been after?" asked Bob.

The woman cast a quick glance at her husband, and said she did n't know, but in her queer dialect she gave an excited account of what had happened—from her point of view.

That forenoon they had suddenly been invaded by a whirlwind of bees. The family had tried at first to shut themselves up in the house, but the bees forced an entrance through hundreds of crevices, and they had had to take to the woods. Larue had been terribly stung while trying to get a cow out of the barn, and two hens had been killed by the bees. Afraid to leave cover, the family had been sitting all day under the smudge-smoke, without food, not daring to go to the house to find any. She knew, of course, that these were the Harman bees, but the boys were relieved to find that she seemed to have no sort of suspicion that the raid had been planned.

"We must get this thing stopped," whispered Carl, drawing his brother aside. "The bees 'll kill everything on the place."

"Yes, and after dark we can carry away the rest of the honey ourselves," replied Bob.

"These people won't try to stop us. In fact, now will be a good time to try to make up a peace with them."

"You 'll be all right by to-morrow, Mr. Larue," said Carl, reassuringly. "Perhaps you know better than we do what attracted the bees down here, but we 'll try to fix it so they won't bother you any more."

"I move away from zis place!" cried the squatter, energetically. "Ze bee—he make my life one misery!"

"Well, I 'm sorry it happened," returned Bob. "Here 's a dollar to pay for your two hens, and we 'll send you some honey—for the children."

The woman took the dollar bill, muttered a word of thanks, but did not seem much propitiated. As for stopping the raid, the boys could do nothing till the bees stopped of themselves for the night. It was really dangerous to venture out of the shelter of the woods. Even sunset brought little cessation of the uproar, and it was not till it was quite dark that the bees gradually ceased to hover about the barn and cabin.

Bob and Carl then accompanied the Larues to

their house, which was strewn with dead and half-dead bees. On the table were several unmistakable pieces of section honey, which the boys wisely pretended not to see. No doubt Larue had brought them in for breakfast, but the bees had taken all the honey out of the combs. After finishing the honey, they had licked up everything sweet in the house, including two quarts of maple syrup and a jar of raspberry jam.

The barefooted children were at once stung by treading on the stupefied bees that crawled over the floor. Larue flung himself down on the bed and started up again instantly, with a loud ejaculation. There were bees in the bed, too. The woman took a broom and began to sweep the insects out, but the boys judged it more politic not to stay.

"Can you lend us a lantern?" inquired Bob. "We want to look into the barn. There 's some honey of ours there that we want to take away. When it 's gone, the bees will leave you alone."

"*Oui,* I get you ze lantern," said the woman. "Look in ze barn. Look anywhere. But I see

no honey. I know nottings about it. I get you anyt'ing, only you take dose bees away."

Though the bees had ceased flying, there were many of them still crawling about the log barn, and in the lantern-light they perceived a big pile of something lightly covered with hay.

"There it is!" exclaimed Carl, with satisfaction.

It was indeed the stolen shipping cases and supers, and the hay covering had not prevented the bees from getting at them. At a glance the honey seemed to be all there. At the worst, not many of the sections were missing, though the honey was presumably all cleaned out of them. There were a good many bees still in the boxes, and the floor was covered with dead insects. Evidently they had fought ferociously over the plunder.

"Quite a load of stuff to take home in the boat," remarked Carl, as they surveyed the rescued honey.

"Yes, but if all the honey is out of it, it won't be heavy, I fancy," said Bob. "I saw an old wheelbarrow around here, and we 'll use it to take

the stuff to the boat. We absolutely must get it all home to-night, before these people recover from their shock."

The top cases of honey were indeed light, and seemed to contain nothing but empty combs—hardly that, in fact, for the wax sifted out in fine powder, for it had been torn to pieces by the frenzied bees. But as they went deeper the boxes grew heavier; some of them seemed almost full weight, though no doubt they were all damaged enough to be unsaleable.

It took three boat-loads to get the honey back home, and it was hard and heavy work pulling it up against the current. Alice was jubilant, and when they came up with the second load she had a supper of bacon, trout, cold partridge, and hot coffee ready for them. They needed it; food had never tasted so good; and after finishing everything in sight, they went back for the last load.

"We ought to bring those six hives of bees home, too," said Carl, uneasily.

"I suppose we should, but who cares?" replied Bob. "I 'm dead tired, and I would n't row up that river again for a whole apiary. Larue

does n't know where they are. We 'll bring them up at sunrise in the morning. I 'm going to bed."

But it was then considerably after midnight. The boys overslept, and did not waken till eight o'clock. The bees at home were flying already, showing signs of much excitement, and could be seen going down the river as on the day before. They were still looking for stolen honey.

"Won't they hang around and bother the Frenchman again to-day?" Bob asked.

"I 'm afraid so," said Carl. "But it can't be helped, and they 'll soon find that there 's nothing more to be had, and go about their business. It 'll be better when we get those six hives home."

It was after nine o'clock when they reached the ambushed hives, and at the first glance Carl uttered a loud cry of dismay.

"Why, they 're all shot to pieces!"

They both ran up. One hive was overturned, with a great, splintered hole blown through its side; a second was nearly as bad, and all the remaining four had been more or less perforated with buckshot. Honey had run out on the ground, and the bees were crawling about stu-

pidly, seeming too much disconcerted to gather it up.

"Looks as if Larue had got his eyes open again," said Carl, as they surveyed the wreck.

"Yes, and he 's on the warpath!" Bob lamented. "Just when I had planned to make peace with him! I hoped he 'd never find out that we had engineered this riot, and we 've paid him for his hens, and I was going to send him some honey to sweeten him up. And now it 's all off."

"Well, I don't believe this is a particularly safe spot for us if he 's out with his gun," said Carl. "Let 's get these hives moved away."

First Bob peeped through the thickets into the clearing. A good many bees still hung about the barn and cabin, and no doubt they were fiercely cross at finding no honey where they had expected it. There was no sign of the French family; very likely they were under their smudge again.

"I can't say I blame Larue for being mad," said Bob, "after being driven out of his house for two days running. I suppose he expected to find all quiet this morning, and it 's almost as bad as

ever. Then he found these hives and he naturally bombarded them."

"Well, if he had n't brought our honey down here it would n't have happened!" returned Carl, hard-heartedly. "He 'll bombard us, too, if we hang around here long."

They carried the dilapidated hives down to the boat with a good deal of difficulty, and rowed them up-stream. Two of them were ruined, but it was likely that the bees themselves and the combs would do very well if lodged in fresh hives. The outfit was nearly double its former weight and a later investigation showed that the bees had crammed every available cell with honey and had built fresh scraps of comb in any corner where there was room.

On their return Alice met them with a joyful face.

"What do you think?" she cried. "I 've been sorting over the cases of sections you brought back, and there are a lot that have n't been touched by the bees at all—perhaps three or four hundred; and there are quite a lot more that have

only little torn places; so they can go as 'No. 1' anyway. Then there are all the sections that were n't stolen at all. We 'll still have some honey to sell."

"Maybe a hundred dollars' worth," returned Carl. "That won't go far toward our big payment next week."

"Yes, it will—with our extracted honey," urged Bob. "We must get it all off, extract every drop we have, and sell it quick—sacrifice it if necessary. Anything to get returns at once!"

"There must be four hundred dollars' worth on the hives. We can make the payment, if we 're quick," said Alice.

"Anyway, we won't have a cent left over," insisted Carl, who seemed determined to look on the black side.

"But we have the bees. Next year they 'll make our fortunes," said Alice, cheerfully.

Tired as he was, Bob paddled down to Morton that afternoon, wrote a letter of explanation to Brown & Son, and ordered by telegraph nine hundred five-pound honey pails, to be shipped by return freight. The pails cost forty dollars, and

he groaned inwardly as he parted with the money.

It was with some uneasiness that he navigated his boat past the squatter's clearing, but he saw nothing of any of the Larue family, either coming or going. When he got back to the bee-yard he found that Alice and Carl had been busy. They had brought in the old honey extractor, cleaned and oiled it and set it up, along with the honey-tanks. Carl had improvised an uncapping-box from the rain-water barrel, and they had already extracted the honey from a great number of the damaged and unfinished sections of comb.

The three of them finished up that part of the work during the afternoon and cleaned out all the honey from the unsaleable sections and from those that the bees had torn in Larue's barn. From these they got more than a thousand pounds of fine, clear honey. It was an excellent beginning.

But it was only a beginning. In five days they would have to pay Mr. Farr five hundred dollars with interest. To sell the honey might well take two days. Consequently they had something more than two days in which to take off, extract,

and pack a crop of perhaps four thousand pounds of honey. It would have been a fairly large undertaking for skilled men, and the Harmans were quite unaccustomed to extracting on a large scale.

But they had determination enough to make up for lack of experience. They went to bed early, in order to have as long a rest as possible. By daylight Alice was preparing breakfast, and the sun was not more than fairly above the trees when they attacked the big job.

Armed with veils, gloves, smokers, and bee-brushes, the boys went out to the yard, while Alice waited for the honey to come in. The big extracting supers were full of bees, that rushed up furiously when the cover was lifted off. Carl drove them down with smoke, while Bob quickly lifted out comb after comb, shook and brushed off the bees in masses before the hive, and put the combs into an empty super. When that was full, he carried it with some difficulty into the house. While he was gone Carl removed the now vacant super, closed the hive, and smoked another. Bob came back in a moment and cleared the bees from this super, carrying it like-

wise into the cabin. Super after super came off, and when seven or eight of them were stacked in the honey-room they began extracting operations.

Alice had volunteered to do the uncapping, as she had been accustomed to do it at home, and she had the huge, razor-edged honey-knife already standing in a pail of hot water, since the edge cuts much better when warm enough to melt the wax.

She rested one of the full honeycombs on the rim of the barrel, and with a single sweep of the great knife she sliced off the entire outer sealed surface of the comb, so as to leave the cells open. Repeating this operation upon the other side, she handed the comb to Carl, who slipped it into the extractor. When four combs had been uncapped and put into the machine, he turned the crank vigorously. The reel whirred as the combs spun round; impelled by centrifugal force, the honey flew out of the cells against the sides of the extractor and dribbled slowly down to the bottom.

When he stopped the machine to take out the now empty combs Carl put his finger down into

the extractor and scraped up a dripping finger-ful of honey, which he put into his mouth.

"Delicious!" he exclaimed, with high appreciation.

Meanwhile Alice had uncapped a fresh set of four combs, and a pool of honey was forming in the bottom of the extractor. It was so thick that it ran very slowly down the sides, but within a few minutes it stood several inches deep. Bob drew off a pailful through the gate, and poured it through the cheese-cloth strainer into one of the tanks. It was almost water-clear, thick and rich —honey of the very highest grade.

Bob then returned to the hives and began to bring in supers single-handed, taking back the sets of emptied combs and replacing them on the hives. He was able to attend to this duty as fast as Alice and Carl could uncap and extract. At noon, when Alice stopped work to prepare dinner, they had extracted almost six hundred pounds of honey. It was the harvest from fourteen hives.

"Why, that is n't half bad," said Alice, after

making this calculation. "That amounts to about forty-five pounds per hive. Better than I expected from this poor season."

"We may have more honey than we think," said Carl, brightening. "But we must get ahead faster, or it 'll take us all the week."

During the afternoon they managed to empty the supers of twenty-one colonies. But these were not quite so well filled, and yielded only a little more than seven hundred pounds.

That night it rained—the longed-for rain, now too late to be of service. Early the next morning they set to work again, but had to stop taking off honey on account of a fresh downpour. In the midst of the rain the wagon arrived from Morton with the nine hundred honey-pails.

"Could n't we send some of it back with him?" suggested Alice.

So they begged the teamster to wait a few hours, and set to work furiously, filling the tins from the tanks. Bob sat by the tank with a mountain of five-pound pails beside him, filling them rapidly from the open honey-gate. Once

full, he passed them to Alice, who wiped them clean and put on the covers; then Carl nailed them up again in their shipping crates.

At noon they ate a hasty, cold luncheon, and again set feverishly to work at the pails. They made such speed that at four o'clock they were able to start the wagon back with a load of two hundred five-pound pails of honey.

The rain had stopped, and they began to take off honey and extract again. They were getting rather tired, and the task before them seemed endless. It was the twenty-ninth of the month. It seemed hardly possible that they could put up all that honey and turn it into cash in less than three days.

All that afternoon they toiled, weary and silent, but still determined. The uncapping barrel was nearly full of oozy masses of comb, from which the honey drained slowly into a pail through a hole in the bottom. The three Harmans were smeared to the eyes with honey. They were stiff with stings, too, for the whole room was crawling with bees that had been brought in on the combs. They were underfoot, on the walls, in the cap-

pings and the strainer, and a great mass had clustered on the window like a swarm.

By six o'clock there were scarcely half a dozen hives left uncleared in the apiary, though a large pile of unhandled supers had accumulated in the workroom. They stopped work, and the boys helped Alice to get supper.

"But we 're not going to get through in time," said Bob, anxiously. "It 'll take us nearly all of to-morrow to extract and can up the rest of the honey. Then it 'll take some time to get it sold."

"But we 've *got* to get through in time!" cried Alice. "Are we going to fail now by just a few hours?"

"Well, let 's finish the extracting to-night—work till it 's done," Bob proposed.

"All right," replied Carl, wearily. "I 'm game!"

So after supper they attacked their task afresh. The boys tried to get all the supers into the house while daylight lasted. They worked hard, but the last supers were very heavy, the bees were cross as night came on, and darkness had fallen before they got the last one in. Alice placed

several beeswax candles about the room, and they began to extract.

Hour after hour the whir and rattle of the extractor went on. It was almost the only sound in the room, for they were too tired to talk. The pile of full supers went down, and the empty ones went up, till they clogged the room, and had to be carried outdoors. Alice uncapped till she could no longer hold the slippery knife-handle, and Carl took her place, while she drew off honey from the extractor into the tanks. It was hot in the choked little room, reeking with the odor of honey and the smell of the candles and the tankful of wet cappings, and occasionally they went outdoors for a few minutes to cool off and breathe a little.

"Alice said that bee-keeping was kid-glove work—nothing heavy or hard about it," remarked Carl ironically during one of these rests.

It seemed to be tacitly understood that they were to keep at it till the honey was all extracted, and they stayed doggedly at work despite weariness and stings. It was shortly after one o'clock when they emptied the last super; they were all

saturated with honey and perspiration; the uncapping tank was heaped with wax, and the candles had burned low. All the tanks were brimful, and there was over a hundred pounds in the reservoir of the extractor.

"Going to can it up?" asked Carl, faintly.

"Not much!" Bob ejaculated. "I 'm going to bed."

They were all ready to go. Alice retired to her room, and the boys spread blankets on the floor of the living-room. They were tired enough to doze the moment their heads touched the pillow, but Bob had not been in bed for five minutes when he bounced up with a yell. A bee had stung him on the leg.

The floor and the blankets were alive with bees. Bees seemed to be everywhere. The boys shook out their bedding, swept up the floor, and tried again. There were fewer bees now, but still enough to make their presence felt, and finally the boys became nervous and wakeful, imagining that they felt crawling bees even where there were none. After a restless half-hour Bob got up and lighted a candle.

"I can't sleep. I 'm going to can up honey," he announced.

Carl wearily followed him, and after they had been at work a few minutes Alice came out and joined them. There had not been so many bees in her room, but more than enough to make sleeping impossible.

Hour after hour they drew off honey from the big tanks into the little pails, and packed them in the crates. They worked till after three o'clock, stopped for hot coffee and bread, and completed their great task soon after sunrise. There were altogether 675 five-pound tins, beside the two hundred already sent to Morton—a total crop of 4375 pounds. At least fifty pounds more would still drain from the uncapping tank.

But they were too dead weary to rejoice. They ate a hastily prepared breakfast, then carried the blankets to a sunny spot outdoors and went sound asleep. Not one of them woke till nearly noon, when they were aroused by the hallooing of the teamster, who had been ordered to come back that day for another load.

It made a big load, and the man was unwilling

to take it. But they could not think of another day's wait, and finally persuaded him with arguments and increased pay. Bob was to go out with the load, they had agreed. He was to ship the honey and go to Toronto with it. There he was to make the quickest possible sale and send the money back by telegraph.

"You 'd better come over to Morton on the first of August, day after to-morrow," he said to Carl, as he was leaving. "Probably you 'll find the money waiting for you at the telegraph office. If it is n't there, wait at the hotel, and I 'll telephone you some time during the day. In case there 's any delay, get old Farr to let us have a few days' grace. He ought to do that, especially if we pay him for the accommodation."

Bob went off on the loaded wagon. Carl and Alice were too thoroughly tired to feel inclined to clear up the sticky litter in the extracting-room and they spent most of the day in sleep.

Next morning, however, they put things in order. The tank of wet cappings was left to drain still longer, but Alice washed down the floor, removed the extracting outfit, and restored the boys'

bed. All the live bees in the room were by this time clustered in a quiet lump on the window, and Carl was able to brush them off gently into a bucket and carry them out to a hive like a natural swarm. He put most of the wet supers back on the hives whence they had been taken, and was surprised to notice that the bees paid no attention to these fresh, sticky combs when they were exposed in the yard. A little honey seemed to be coming in. He could not guess its source, but it was enough to keep the bees from robbing.

All this did not take them more than a couple of hours, and Alice had even time to wash, dry, and iron a blouse before starting for the village which represented civilization for them just then. Carl also paid civilization the homage of brushing his shoes and putting on a tie under his low collar, and then they made an early start down the river.

They rather disliked to leave the cabin unguarded, but this time it contained little of value. As they passed Indian Slough they spied Larue on the shore; he looked long and steadily after them, but neither made any sign.

"Don't like it!" remarked Carl. "He knows we 've gone away now, and goodness knows what he may do to the bees!"

"I don't think he 'll touch them. He must have had enough of fighting bees," returned Alice.

Anyhow, it was a chance that had to be taken, for they could not stand on guard by the apiary forever. They reached Morton about ten o'clock and went straight to the telegraph office, where they were bitterly disappointed to find no waiting message from Bob.

A feeling of impending misfortune crept over both of them. They had fully expected the money to be there.

"I do hope Bob does n't try one of his wild bluffs for a high price and miss a sale altogether!" Carl muttered.

Alice went to the hotel, to be on the lookout for a telephone call, while Carl hung about the telegraph office. At every clicking of the keys he thrilled with anticipation, but noon arrived, and one o'clock, and still no word from Toronto. Carl then hunted up Mr. Farr and explained the situation.

"I don't know why Bob has n't wired," he said, "but we 've got the honey and it 's as safe as money in the bank. It 's only a matter of a few hours, or days, at the most. If you 'll give us a little extension of time we 'll gladly pay you for it. Anything you wish, five dollars, or ten dollars a day, even."

But the postmaster shook his head with a grim smile.

"I 'll give you all the time the law allows, and not an hour longer!" he said.

"Yes, but can't you—"

"No, I can't. I told you out and out at the start that you 'd get no kindness from me—straight business and nothing further."

He refused to hear a word of Carl's protestations, and at last the boy went to the hotel, indignant and keenly anxious. Alice had had no message. They waited, staying near the telephone, unable to read, unable to talk, till, about four o'clock, a call came for Carl.

Almost breathless, he took the receiver, and recognized Bob's long-distance voice.

"Is that you, Bob?" he cried. "What have you done? Farr won't give us an hour's time."

"Never mind!" came his brother's reassuring voice. "It 's all right. I sold at ten and a half. I 've got the money and I 'll wire it at once."

Ten and a half! They had not expected to get over ten cents for the extracted honey. Carl almost shouted, and Alice gasped with relief when he told her. It seemed as if a mountain's weight had been lifted off their shoulders.

But there must have been some delay about sending the money, for it had not arrived by six o'clock. Carl hung about the telegraph office all the evening, growing uneasy once more as hour by hour went by. Surely something had not gone wrong at the last minute!

But the money-bearing message did finally arrive towards ten o'clock. It was an order for $612, which included the returns from what was left of their comb-honey crop. The telegraph clerk wrote a check, and Carl and his sister hastened to Farr's house. It was dark from top to bottom. Carl knocked loudly once, twice. There was no reply.

CHAPTER VIII

A RUN OF LUCK

AGAIN and again Carl hammered at the door. At last some one raised a window in the second story, and a voice called down rather crossly through the darkness.

"It 's Harman!" Carl cried. "I 've come to pay your money."

"Too late. I 'm abed," answered Mr. Farr. "Come in to-morrow."

"Not much!" retorted Carl. "It 's due before midnight to-day, and you said you would n't give me an hour's extra time. I 'm not taking any chances. I 'm afraid you 'll have to get up."

Mr. Farr chuckled and left the window. They heard him stirring about, and presently saw the light of a lamp. In a few minutes he opened the front door and conducted them into the sitting-room. His hair was tousled, and he was in his stocking-feet and looked older and more wizened

than ever, but something seemed to be amusing him greatly.

Carl produced the telegraph check. Mr. Farr scrutinized it carefully, chuckled once more, wrote a receipt, and gave them a check of his own in change.

"I 'm obleeged for the money," he said, smiling broadly, "but you need n't have been in such an all-fired hurry with it."

"It was your fault," Carl explained. "You said, you know—"

"Yes, I know, and I expect the joke 's on me at having to get up in the middle of the night like this. But the law gives you three days of grace, you know. And besides, you can't foreclose a mortgage without giving thirty days' notice. You had a whole month to pay in. Guess you ain't studied mortgage law. That 's why I would n't take your ten dollars a day for an extension, and I was having my quiet laugh to see you so flustered and worrited, when you was n't in no danger at all."

"But—but I thought—" Carl stammered.

"That I 'd grab the bees away from you to-

morrow? Foreclosing a mortgage is a slower business than that. Now you think I 'm a pretty hard customer, don't you?"

Carl blushed.

"Well, I 'll tell you now that I never foreclosed but one mortgage in my life, and that was on a farm where I had n't got no interest for three years, and the fellow was boasting that Dave Farr 'd never get a cent out of him. Foreclosed on him, I did; but I 'd have no more shut down on young people like you than I 'd have sold myself out."

"I 'm sorry, Mr. Farr! We did n't understand —either the business, or you!" cried Alice, and she held out her hand impulsively.

"That 's all right, young lady. You did n't know nothing about business, of course, and I did, that 's all. I oughter have told you how you stood instead of laughing, and it serves me right to be got up out of bed at this time of night. And now my sleep 's broke up, I 'll have a chaw, and you can tell me how your investment panned out."

Mr. Farr produced a black plug of tobacco from inside the clock, bit off a piece and disposed him-

self to listen. Carl briefly outlined their fortunes, and told of the trouble they had had with Larue. Mr. Farr laughed heartily at the expedient of the robber bees.

"I see you young people are as sharp as they make 'em!" he said. "Just think of sending them bees to bring back their own honey! But I know Baptiste Larue—known him for years. He ain't such a bad fellow, lazy and steals a little, and if you play him a bad trick he 'll get back at you sure as fate. That 's the Indian in him; and if you do him a good turn he 'll never forget it, and that 's the Indian too, I guess. Pity you 've got at loggerheads with him. Better try to straighten it out. I 'll have a talk with him when I see him, and maybe I can help to straighten things out."

They went back to the hotel to sleep that night with the feeling that an enemy had suddenly been transformed into a friend. Mr. Farr promised to help them in every way he could; at the same time he was careful to assure them that business was business, and he would still hold them to the strict letter of the mortgage. But this time Alice laughed, and he did not seem offended.

They expected Bob to come up on the train next morning, but he failed to arrive. It seemed unwise to remain away from the bee-yard any longer, so they embarked immediately for the voyage up the river.

It was a fine, sunny morning. The rains had broken the drought, and the air was full of the moist heat that makes good honey weather, but the raspberry bloom was long since over.

The harvest was past; the bee-season was practically done, and they had saved themselves, if only by the skin of their teeth. Now that the money was paid, they both felt the reaction from the strain and fatigue of the last weeks. The thought of their finances depressed them. They had not two hundred dollars in the world.

"If we 'd only had some more of this weather a month ago!" said Carl.

"Yes, it would have meant hundreds of dollars. But there 's no hope of anything more from the bees this year," Alice replied.

"Worse than nothing! For we 'll probably have to feed them sugar to winter on, perhaps a hundred dollars' worth. It 'll leave us nearly broke,

I 'm afraid. Alice, we 'll have to go to the city this winter and do as I proposed."

They rowed up the river for a long way in silence. Then Alice, trying hard to speak hopefully, said, "Anyhow, we 've got a lot of valuable property, and next year—"

"Hark!" Carl interrupted. "What 's that?"

He had stopped rowing, and there was dead silence in the wilderness. A jay called noisily from a treetop, and then again silence fell. After a minute, as Alice listened, she seemed to hear a deep, murmurous hum from the woods along the shore.

"It sounds like bees," she said, doubtfully.

"It is bees!" affirmed Carl after listening a little longer. "It must be our bees. But what are they after? How far are we from home?"

Alice thought they were about two miles. They had passed Indian Slough some time before.

"I do hope they 're not after Larue again," said Carl. "But most likely they 've found a wild bee-tree and are robbing it."

But after a few minutes Carl grew so curious that he went ashore and tried to follow the flight

of the bees, which could now be seen passing overhead. Presently Alice heard him calling her, in great excitement.

She hastened after him. He was standing at the edge of a great burned slash that extended for fully two miles. It was studded with charred, spike-branched trees and second-growth hemlock, tangled with berry bushes, and choked with quantities of a weed that grew three feet or more high and bore spikes of brilliant, crimson-pink flowers.

On the nearest spike of blossoms Alice saw three or four bees, and from the whole tract resounded the deep, busy hum that they had heard from the river.

"D' you know what that is?" shouted Carl, dancing with exultation. "Willow-herb! Fireweed! What do you think of that?"

Alice also recognized it. Willow-herb—also known as "fireweed," because it always springs up in the track of forest fires—is one of the best honey-yielding plants in America. It flowers in late summer, and lasts until frost kills it, secreting nectar heavily whenever the weather is at all favorable. A single colony of bees has been known

to gather the almost incredible amount of four hundred pounds of honey from this plant alone. It does not grow in the settled portions of the country, and as the Harmans had never seen it in profusion, they had never thought of including it among their prospective resources.

"O Carl!" cried Alice. "We may get a big crop after all! Let 's hurry home and see what the bees are doing."

Burning with impatience, they hurried up the river as fast as the heavy old tub could be driven against the stream. Without waiting to tie the boat, they ran to the apiary. The air was full of a heavy roar. Bees were coming in by thousands and dropping on the hive-entrances. It was like the best days of the raspberry flow. Carl seized his sister by the waist and joyously hugged her.

"It seems too good to be true! If it only lasts! Won't Bob be astonished when he gets here?"

Bob did not arrive till late the next afternoon. He had walked all the way from Morton to save the expense of a conveyance and he was very tired. He had also probably been meditating on their financial state, for he seemed depressed;

but Carl and Alice said nothing at once about the sudden change in their prospects.

The bees had ceased flying for the day, but from all the hives, where the new honey was being ripened, came a heavy roar. After supper Bob walked out towards the hives and noticed it. He stopped to listen, and scrutinized the entrances closely.

"Been feeding them?" he asked at last, with a perplexed look.

"No," answered Carl, gravely.

"Surely they can't have been gathering anything, can they?"

"Gathering anything!" Carl burst out, unable to hold the secret any longer. "I guess those bees have gathered about a thousand pounds of honey in the last two days. The fireweed is in bloom, Bob. We never thought of that, did we? There are miles of it! It yields honey by the ton, and if we just get regular rains we 'll have our eighteen-hundred-dollar crop yet."

Bob could hardly believe the news till he had looked into some of the supers himself, where great patches of clear, white honey already

showed. Then his enthusiasm knew no bounds.

"I was just beginning to think we 'd been fools to go into this apiary game," he exclaimed. "But this puts a different color on the thing. If we only get the right weather, now!"

For the next three days the weather was indeed perfect, and the bees did marvelously well. A visit to the new apiary by the lake showed that the colonies there were also storing heavily and needed supers. They had never expected this yard to yield any surplus honey this season, but the bees were actually crowding the queen out of the combs with the rush of new honey.

"We 'll have to get a team and have a load of supers hauled over," said Alice. "One thing 's certain—next season we must have a horse and wagon of our own. We must have paid out over fifty dollars for team-hire this summer, and now we 'll have to have all these supers hauled home again for extracting."

However, they had to have a quantity of lumber brought out from Morton to make winter cases for the increased number of colonies, and the teamster moved the load of supers while he

was there. The management of the bees during this late honey-flow was simple. Bees rarely swarm after midsummer, and they only needed to be let alone to fill their empty combs with the honey from the willow-herb, whose crimson spikes were visible everywhere. Exploring the woods the apiarists found it in immense quantities in every burned slash; they had seen the green plants often enough during the summer, but had not recognized it until it came in bloom. There appeared to be forage for hundreds of colonies.

Raspberries were ripe now, and the Harmans gathered quarts. They might have gathered barrels, if they had had any means of disposing of them. They ate them in every possible manner —raw, stewed, in pies, but mainly with fresh, extracted honey poured over them, which they found to be a dish worthy of any epicure's attention. Alice also made a great quantity of jam with some sugar that was left from the spring feeding, and filled up all the remaining honey-pails.

It was the fruitful season of the wilderness. Game was growing more plentiful. The woods

and streams were full of the new broods of partridges and ducks, strong-winged now and wary. Hares were everywhere, and once, while picking berries, Carl caught a glimpse of a black bear. It was only a glimpse, for the bear vanished like lightning, but Carl carried a rifle after that when he went for berries.

He carried it in vain, but it occurred to him that the lakeside apiary was terribly exposed to a bear's depredations, and he carried the big trap over there, and set it among the hives. He found the yard in perfect safety, and the bees storing honey fast in nearly all the supers.

All through the latter part of August the weather remained warm and clear. Not much rain fell, but light showers came often enough to keep the fireweed from drying up, and the bees were busily at work almost every day. And now Alice set to work to improve the breed of the bees by queen-rearing operations.

To transform a black colony into Italians, it is only necessary to exchange their queen for an Italian queen. In the course of a couple of months the old generation of black bees will all

have died, and all the newly hatched brood will be the offspring of the Italian mother. But Alice could not afford to buy any more queens, and she had determined to rear them herself.

The rearing of thoroughbred queens is a special art in itself. Any colony, if deprived of its queen, will raise a number of queen-cells to produce another, but these cells will of course be from eggs laid by the old queen, and the new queen will be of the same breed. To change the breed it is necessary to manœuver a substitution without the bees being aware of it.

Alice began by killing the queen of one of the black colonies that had proved bad-tempered and a poor honey-gatherer. For four days, then, she let the hive alone. At the end of that time she went over all the combs and cut out every queen-cell that had been started.

This produced terrible consternation in the hive. There were no larvæ now in the hive young enough to produce a queen, for queen-cells cannot be raised from a larva more than three days old. The bees ran about the entrance in consternation, and the loud, shrill buzzing of their

despair could be heard across the contented hum of the normal colonies. But Alice was already taking measures for their relief.

She prepared a flat stick an inch wide, just long enough to fit inside an empty brood-frame. Upon this stick she stuck a dozen little cups of molded beeswax, much the size and shape of an acorn cup, and into each cup she put a little lump of the white royal jelly taken from the queen-cells that she had destroyed. This operation is called "priming" the cells. The next step was to graft them.

For some time Alice and the boys had been carefully watching the egg-laying work of the Italian queens that they had bought, and they had already selected the two that seemed best to use as breeders. Neither of these, it should be said, was the famous three-dollar queen. In actual performance she was outstripped by several of the ordinary one-dollar sort.

From the hive of the best breeding queen Alice selected a comb containing eggs and just hatched young larvæ. These little larvæ were almost invisible, tiny white worms no larger than the

comma on a page of print, floating in milky food at the bottom of each cell. It was delicate work to touch them, but with the point of a hairpin Alice fished out one of these for each of the primed artificial cells, laying it carefully down in the royal jelly. Hurriedly, then, lest the incipient queens should be chilled, she put this stick of cell-cups into the unfortunate queenless colony.

Next morning she went to look at it. Out of the dozen cells the queenless bees had accepted ten, were drawing the cells out already into the usual peanut shape, and had fed the larvæ large quantities of additional royal jelly. All was going well, and Alice proceeded to prepare a fresh set of cups for another colony.

It takes twelve days for a queen to hatch after the cell has been started in this manner. Early on the twelfth day, Alice selected the twelve colonies in most need of requeening, went through the combs, found the queens and killed them.

About three hours later she put into each of these hives one of her grafted cells, now on the point of hatching. In one case, indeed, the cell

hatched in her fingers, and a beautiful, yellow, Italian virgin queen emerged.

In ten or twelve days more, all these young queens would be mated and laying, and these colonies could be considered Italian for the future—Italian, at least on the mother's side, for the worker-bees would also be affected by the drone parentage.

Queen-rearing can only be carried on during a honey-flow, and while the good fireweed flow lasted, Alice raised several dozen queen-cells. All did not go smoothly, of course. Sometimes the bees refused to accept the artificial cells, tearing them down as fast as they were given; once a young queen hatched prematurely, and her royal jealousy immediately caused her to demolish all the rest of the cells on the frame, tearing out her young sisters and stinging them to death. Some queens were also lost on their mating flight, but in all Alice succeeded, with the help of the boys, in requeening about fifty colonies.

By this time most of the colonies had filled an extracting super apiece. Some had filled two. Nearly all the damaged sections of comb had been

put back on the hives, and the bees had refilled them with alacrity, sealing them over as white and smooth as if they had been freshly built. There would be a good deal of section honey to sell after all.

"I don't believe I ever saw a honey-flow last so well," said Alice. "It surely can't go on much longer, and I 'm almost afraid to look out every morning, for fear it 's over."

They expected frost every day now, but for another full week the weather continued warm and open, and the bees continued to bring in nectar, though in daily-diminishing quantities. Then one evening the wind shifted into the north, and the temperature went down, not to frost, but low enough to stop the secretion of nectar. The bees were idle, and that day the tragedy of the drones began. The long steady flow of honey had caused the bees to tolerate them until late, but now their time had come. At every hive-entrance the bees could be seen chasing them, biting and worrying them, driving them out, but seldom stinging. The big, stingless drone is very

much afraid of his armed little sisters, and is unable to resist when thrown out of the hive. All day long could be heard the loud buzzing of the drones as they tried in vain to reënter their homes, and the next morning they could be seen by scores, dead in front of the hives, where they had perished of cold and starvation. In a week hardly a drone was left in the apiary.

This meant an end to Alice's queen-rearing, and she took out and destroyed the last set of cells that was under way. It was now too late in the season to kill a queen and attempt to replace her. Every effort had to be turned toward getting the colonies into the best condition for winter.

The weather did turn slightly warmer, but the honey-flow did not recommence. Then, early one morning, when Carl went out to the yard, he found the tops of the hives white with hoar-frost.

"That 's the end of it," he said. "Well, we can't complain, for it 's lasted wonderfully."

That day the fireweed flowers hung wilted in the sunshine. The honey-season was certainly over this time. Nothing remained to be done

now but to extract and sell what was on the hives, but they considered it better to leave it in the supers to ripen for another week.

All the honey at the lakeside apiary would have to be hauled home to be extracted, since there was no extracting-house near or any facilities for doing the work. It was somewhat uncertain how much was there, for they had not visited that yard for about two weeks. It was needful now, however, to make up a close estimate of the amount of honey to be taken off, for they wanted to order the honey-tins to hold the crop. Bob offered to go over to the lake and count the supers, and he set off early in the morning, taking his rifle.

It was a beautifully crisp autumn day. Squirrels chattered from the trees; partridges roared up from the undergrowth. Bob sighted a fresh deer-trail on the old lumber road, but the legal season for deer had not yet opened. He shot a couple of partridges on the way, however, clipping their heads neatly with a bullet, and hung them up on a tree to be picked up on his return.

He was quite a quarter of a mile from the apiary when he became aware of a faint murmur,

which he took for the breeze in the tree-tops. But as he advanced it increased to a roar. It sounded like a dozen swarms flying at once. Bob was bewildered, then scared, and he began to run.

"It can't possibly be swarming!" he thought. "Surely the bees in this yard have n't struck a new honey-flow at this time of year."

Breathlessly he came out upon the shore of the little lake. The apiary was in sight. The roar increased to a tremendous volume, but even Bob's ears perceived the difference between the contented hum of a working yard, and this high-pitched, angry, tumultuous note that filled the air.

CHAPTER IX

STOPPING A WAR

BOB hurried through the debris of dead timber till he got a clear view of the bee-yard. It was plain enough that something was seriously wrong, for the whole place was in a state of wild disorder. The air was full of circling bees, and the white fronts of most of the hives were brown with masses of bees, crawling and surging excitedly. One hive near him was actually almost hidden by the cloud that hovered about it. It looked as if a swarm was coming out, but Bob knew better. It was war in the apiary. The bees had gone on a robbing riot, and this hive had been overcome and was being sacked.

How this fearful state of things had started, Bob was unable to imagine. To be sure, there had been no honey coming in lately, and bees will always rob if they get a chance in a honey dearth; but all the colonies at this yard were now strong

and should have been well able to defend themselves. Bob could not think how matters had ever got in such a state as this.

Advancing a little incautiously, a bee stung him on the nose, and he dodged back again into the shelter of a thicket. Keeping under cover, he skirted about the apiary, viewing the scene carefully, till at the other end he came upon the clue to the mysterious rioting.

Two hives had been upset, and supers, combs, covers, and bottomboards lay strewn about the stony ground. What had done it he could not guess. The thought of Larue passed through his mind, but this hardly looked like the work of any human honey-thief, for the parts of the hives were tossed pell-mell, and frames and combs were smashed and crushed on the ground. He was too far away to get a good view and was afraid to go nearer, for the air was alive with half-maddened bees. Not many bees appeared about the wrecked hives, however; and probably every drop of honey had been licked up from them long ago, but there was no doubt that all this broken honey in the yard had started the rioting.

There is something about stolen honey, especially when it is obtained close to the hives, that causes bees to become almost insane—sometimes entirely so. Virtually every hive seemed to be engaged in repelling robbers and trying itself to rob other colonies. The ground was covered with knots of fighting insects; in front of the hive that was being sacked there was fully a quart of dead and dying bees that had perished in the battle. As soon as this hive had been cleaned out the robbers would attack another, in greatly increased force, and after that a third.

Bob had no means of knowing how long this state of things had been going on, but it would greatly reduce the apiary if it continued much longer. He knew well what he ought to do; the colonies doing most of the robbing should be smoked well to take the courage out of them; the colonies that were being robbed should have wet grass piled all around the entrance. But he needed a veil, for it was really as much as his life was worth to venture unprotected into that cloud of maddened insects. Gloves would be useful, too, but above all he needed a smoker.

All these things were stored in the little hut that they had made in the center of the bee-yard, but to get to it he would have to pass right through the thickest of the fighting. He hung back for some time, hesitating and reluctant. He wished vainly for his brother, but at last he made up his mind, pulled his hat over his eyes, buried his hands in his pockets, turned up his collar, and made a bolt for the little storehouse.

He shot between the rows of hives so fast that for ten yards nothing touched him. Then he was stung on the chin, and again on the nose. But he had almost reached the hut when something caught him by the right ankle with such force that it seemed to break his leg. He tumbled headlong with a sharp cry, fell against a hive and knocked it sideways.

Fortunately it did not overturn, but a gust of savage bees surged into his face. He brushed at them, and tried to get on his feet. Something that hurt extremely was hanging to his right foot. He made a blind leap to get away from that vortex of stinging insects, but was pulled up short by the ankle and fell again, with a rattle of metal.

And now he saw the great, rusty steel trap gripping his foot. He had walked squarely into Carl's bear trap. He had forgotten that it had been set in this yard.

For the moment he was too bewildered to realize more than this bare fact. He crawled away as far as the chain would let him, lay flat on his face and tried to protect himself from the tormenting insects. It seemed to him that all the bees in the yard had turned upon him. They were in his hair, they got under his collar and up his sleeves. Probably there were in reality only a few hundred attacking him, but it seemed to him that he got a fresh sting every second, till his whole body was in agony.

He drew his foot under him to examine the trap, and see if it could not be taken off. Age and rust had taken a good deal of the strength out of the springs, and, luckily, Bob was wearing heavy shoepacks that day with his trousers tucked inside them, so that the combined thicknesses of stout leather, cloth, and socks had deadened the force of the springing jaws. But it hurt ex-

tremely; his foot was numb, and he could not see how to extricate himself.

He tried to press down the springs with his hands, but he was not strong enough. It needed a lever to set that trap. Reckless of stings, Bob stood up and tried to stamp down the spring with his free foot, but in his constrained posture he was barely able to stir it. It would certainly take a lever to open the jaws. If he could only escape into the security of the woods, away from these maddening bees, he felt sure that he could contrive to get himself free, but the chain would let him go no farther. The chain was riveted to the trap in a heavy swivel, and the other end was attached to a stout maple sapling. The tree was too large to break off, but Bob had a stout pocket-knife and thought he might hack through it if he had time enough.

But he was beginning to feel sick and dizzy with the stinging. A professional bee-keeper thinks little of being stung, and Bob was pretty well hardened to it by this time, but not to such wholesale doses. His body was beginning to feel

numb all over, and his tongue seemed swelling in his mouth. A horde of bees, he thought, roared and crawled over him, but his brain seemed stupefied, and he could hardly think connectedly of anything.

The idea dawned upon him that he was really going to be stung to death, and the horror of it whipped his brain to a last effort. He cast about for some expedient. If he only had a smoker! But why could he not make a smoke without one?

Instantly he struck a match and dropped it into a heap of dead leaves that lay beside him. They flamed up, and at the first puff of smoke the bees about his head drifted away. He piled on more leaves, using the dampest he could find, and created a suffocating cloud of smoke. He choked in it himself, but there were no bees about him now, except a few entangled in his clothing.

He crawled toward the maple sapling, raking the burning smudge along with him. Under cover of the smoke he began to whittle into the hard trunk with his knife. Between the thick smoke and a bee-sting that had nearly closed his eye, he worked rather blindly, and had hacked

nearly half through the trunk before he discovered that no such work was necessary. The chain was merely wound around the tree a few times and hooked back into its own links. He might have known that it would be so fastened, and if he had been a little more clear-headed, he could have released himself a moment after being caught.

However, he cast the chain loose immediately and began to hobble toward the woods, trap and all. Once under cover, he pried open the trap without much diffculty, using a stout pole. There was a deep purple furrow on each side of his ankle, and his foot was blue and numb. He rubbed it a long time and bathed it in the lake before feeling came back to it.

He felt decidedly weak and shaky and had to take off all his clothes in order to get rid of the bees that were still crawling and stinging in their recesses. Being stripped, he ducked himself in the cool lake three or four times and felt better. Naturally, he selected a spot for his bath that was at a safe distance from the apiary, where the war was still raging.

He sat down and rested for half an hour after dressing, and then felt recovered sufficiently to make another attempt at subduing the fighting bees. It was imperative that the disorder be stopped at once, and his late experience had given him a hint how to do it.

Going to the windward side of the yard, he collected rubbish and lighted a number of smoky fires, so that the smoke drifted across the hives. Under cover of this smoke he advanced further into the yard and lighted more fires, till the whole apiary was veiled in clouds of vapor.

Fighting stopped instantly. The one thought in each bee's mind was to get back to its own hive, and by myriads they flew or crawled home. In a few minutes Bob was able to make his way safely to the little store-hut, where he secured a veil and smoker, though really he now had little need of either. The few bewildered bees drifting about through the smoke were far too frightened to think of stinging.

Peace was restored, though it might be only a temporary one. Bob made haste to contract the entrances of all colonies that he thought

might be weak. With a night's rest and only an inch-and-a-half doorway to defend, he thought they should be able to take care of themselves.

Then he went to examine the cause and beginning of the trouble—the two overturned hives, and he had scarcely glanced at them when he uttered a loud exclamation. There was no doubt at all who had been the disturber here. Long claw-marks ripped the paint of the hives. The combs and frames had been chewed and mangled, showing plenty of tooth-marks on the splintered wood, and a wisp of black hair clung to one of the covers.

"Br'er Bear, and no mistake about it!" muttered Bob.

About half the combs had been chewed up, both the super combs of honey and the lower-story combs of brood. Apparently the bear had liked the taste of unhatched bees. What honey he had left had, of course, been cleaned up by the bees from the yard, and all the scattered wax was now dry as bone. No doubt the raid had been made during the night, and in the morning the neighboring bees had pounced on the spilled

and scattered honey and gone mad with robbing.

There was not much that he could do now. He put the hives together again, gathered up the scraps of wax, and also straightened the hive that he had fallen against when the trap caught him. But he was much concerned for the future. It was very probable that the bear would return to this sweet corner, and the trap was very little likely to catch him. In any case, the bees would probably recommence their robbing the next morning. For some time that apiary would need careful attention.

He would have liked to leave his smudges burning so that the odor of the smoke would warn the bear away, but he decided that it would be unsafe. The lakeside slope was littered with all sorts of dry rubbish, and a little fire might easily burn up the entire apiary. Having done all he could, he took his rifle and limped home, rather painfully, for his ankle was very lame.

"How much honey did you find there?" Carl demanded when he entered the cabin.

"I don't know. I forgot to look," said Bob. "Only there is n't so much as there was yester-

day, and there 'll be still less if we don't look sharp."

"What on earth 's the matter?" cried Alice. "And how did you ever get so badly stung?"

"Robber bees—robber bears—steel traps!" said Bob succinctly; and he proceeded to tell them of the deplorable conditions he had discovered.

"A bear—a real bear this time!" exclaimed his brother. "He 'll be certain to come back to-night for more. I 'm going to lay for him. Allie, I 'll get you your bearskin after all."

"Then I 'll see you do it," said Alice. "For if you 're going after it to-night I 'll go too."

"Nonsense! We may be up all night. Bob 'll go with me."

"Not on your life!" returned Bob, wearily. "I would n't walk back there this evening to save all the bees from destruction. There 's no sense in going to-night anyway. The bear will never come back with that strong smell of smoke in the yard."

"You can't tell. I believe he would," Carl argued. "His mouth will water for honey too hard to resist. Anyhow, I 'm going to take a chance

on it and wait for him with some buckshot shells."

"And I 'm certainly going!" affirmed Alice. "You don't want to go alone—and Bob says the bear won't come, so there 'll be no danger."

Carl really did not want to spend the night in ambush alone, and as Bob was in no condition for the adventure, he agreed to allow Alice to go with him. There would be a moon that night, but not till after eleven o'clock, and if they were to reach the apiary before dark, it would be necessary to start immediately after supper.

Alice put on a short skirt, a jersey, and a tam-o'Shanter, and took the shotgun, for which Carl carried half a dozen buckshot shells in his pocket. He carried Bob's rifle himself, and they took a lunch with them; for if the vigil lasted all night, they would be decidedly exhausted before daylight. Bob jeered mildly at the whole proceeding, and after watching them off went immediately to bed.

It was a long tramp through the twilight to the lake apiary, and it was almost dark when they arrived. A faint smell of smoke still lingered in the air from Bob's smudges, and from the hives

arose a dull, uneasy roar. Honey had been won and lost that day, but by no honest means, and all the bees were still suspicious and restless. By morning the fighting would probably recommence.

There was a very faint air blowing from south to north, and Carl and Alice ambushed themselves on the leeward side of the yard. The ground rose slightly there, so that they had a good view of the whole apiary. Clumps of small cedars grew all around them, and a big fallen log in front made an excellent breastwork.

They placed their weapons across the log and sat down, glad of the rest. The evening air was cool, almost frosty, and the wilderness was very still. They barely dared converse, even in the faintest whispers.

For an hour or so they were both on tenterhooks of expectation, but as time passed this wore off, and they began to feel weary and drowsy. Carl would have found more difficulty in keeping awake, only that from time to time his ears caught some rustle or crackle in the underbrush that set him thrilling with excitement. But noth-

ing ever appeared in the bee-yard, where the roaring had gradually quieted.

At last the sky lightened over in the east, and the moon gradually appeared between the trees. It was almost full, and the forest changed marvelously into deep black and pale silver. Voices began to be heard from the wilderness as if this were the dawning of the forest day.

The long trail of a swimming muskrat crossed the surface of the lake. A raccoon cried plaintively behind them, and away at the other end of the water they heard the uncanny, cackling laugh of a loon. There were strange murmurings and stirrings everywhere in the undergrowth, and then, far away to the north, sounded a single long shriek, savage and shrill, that caused a sudden long silence in the woods. Probably it was a lynx on his night's hunting.

Moonrise put them both wide awake again for a time. But as an hour passed and nothing in particular happened, they grew drowsy once more. Alice frankly put her head on the big log and dozed, but Carl kept awake with determina-

tion, scrutinizing the edge of the woods all along the ghostly rows of beehives.

Time passes very slowly in such a vigil, and the moon was getting lower in the sky. Carl was growing very tired of it, and he had nudged Alice awake several times, when it suddenly struck him that something had moved in the woods behind him. He was not sure what he had heard, or whether he had heard anything, but the next instant a black figure passed between him and one of the nearest rows of hives.

Almost breathless, he squeezed Alice's arm and she looked up, blinking. Carl pointed. The dim figure moved forward, with a stealthy, heavy, noiseless swing, till it came out in the clear moonlight, and they both saw the figure of the bear distinctly.

It stopped and seemed a trifle uneasy, swinging its head and evidently sniffing the air. Then, seeming reassured, it suddenly reared up on its hind legs, and with one sweep of its paw, sent the cover of the nearest hive flying.

They saw the bees boil up like smoke into the

bright moonlight. Carl grasped the rifle, and cocked it noiselessly. The bear plunged his nose into the super, and they heard the delicate combs and frames smash under his teeth.

A tearing flash from Carl's rifle split the shadows. Alice uttered a shriek of excitement. The bear was down, rolling over beside the hive, and apparently done for. Carl dashed out in triumph.

But as he approached the animal it reared up unsteadily, and launched a vicious sweep with its iron-clawed paw. Carl sprang back, threw up the rifle and pulled the trigger. Only a soft snap answered. He had forgotten to throw another shell into the chamber.

As he tried to protect himself, the gun was dashed out of his hand, and he might have been struck down the next instant, but Alice charged up and fired both barrels of the shotgun at a range of two yards. As it appeared afterwards, she missed the bear cleanly with both shots; but the buckshot, clustering like a bullet, blew the nearest beehive almost to pieces.

But the shots turned the animal's attention,

and it wheeled and charged straight through the shotgun smoke. Carl uttered a shout of horror, but Alice had already dodged and was running like a deer across the bee-yard, with the bear hotly in chase.

Carl groped desperately for the rifle that had flown out of his hands, but failed to find it. Bees from the damaged hives seemed to be crawling all over the ground. He gave up the search and rushed wildly after the bear, shouting at the top of his voice to distract its attention. It paid no heed, but at that moment Alice, with most remarkable gymnastic skill, scrambled into a small hemlock just in time.

But a bear can climb trees better than any girl! Carl saw the animal rear up against the trunk and he flung a knotted lump of wood with all his force. It hit the beast on the back. It turned with a fierce snarl, and Carl in his turn had just time to scramble into a tree to escape its charge.

The moment he had done so he was sorry, for now he was sure to be clawed out of the branches; but man has an almost uncontrollable instinct to climb a tree to avoid a danger. The bear did in-

deed rear up against the trunk, clawing the bark and trying to draw himself up. But he did not actually climb, and it came into Carl's mind that perhaps his first bullet had so injured the animal as to make him unable to climb.

He looked down at it with the most intense anxiety. It really did seem either unable or unwilling to ascend the tree. It walked about uneasily; then went over to the hemlock where Alice was perched, and finally returned to Carl. After sniffing about the foot of the tree it lay down as if on guard.

Carl's hopes rose as he looked at it. For some minutes it hardly seemed to stir, though he could not doubt its intense vigilance. Perhaps it was remaining quiet in the hope that he would be tempted to come down.

"Are you all right, Carl? Where is it?" called Alice, in a low tone.

"Lying like a dog at the foot of my tree," Carl responded. "Are you all right?"

"Fairly comfortable. I 've got a lot of bees on me, though," she added.

Carl presently became aware that he had bees

on him also. The ground must have been covered with them where the bear had torn the hive open; some had probably flown from the combs and settled on the two apiarists. Carl felt one crawling on his neck; he brushed it off, and a moment later was stung by another that had crept up the inside of his trouser-leg. He seemed to have bees crawling all over him, and no doubt Alice, whose skirts afforded less protection, was in even worse case.

In fact, he could hear her squirming about on her branch, and brushing at her clothing.

"They 're stinging me all over," she called piteously at last. "There must be more than a million bees on me. I believe I 'll get down and run."

"Don't do it!" Carl implored. "Try to stand it for a little while. Maybe the bear 'll go away."

But in his heart he knew that the bear was not at all likely to go away before daylight, and that was a long time to wait. The annoyance of the bees was growing intolerable. In the semi-darkness they would not take wing; they merely crawled, and when they became entangled, they

used their stings. Carl could hear the continual "biz-zz" of insects somewhere out of reach under his clothing, and every few minutes he felt the keen thrust.

"I simply can't stand this," groaned Alice, and Carl felt that he had had enough of it too.

"Hold on! Don't move!" he cried. "I 'm going to see if I can't slip down and get the gun."

He was perching in a beech tree with long and spreading branches, and he had already observed that one of these lower limbs drooped to less than a man's height from the earth. Carl began to creep out on this branch, as soundlessly as he could, but despite his care he thought he saw the bear move its head and look at him.

The branch sagged heavily under his weight as he went further out. He was six or eight feet from the trunk, and on the side farthest from the bear, and he hesitated for several seconds. He could see Alice watching him anxiously from her tree.

Finally he made up his mind, swung off, and dropped to earth with the spring of the bough. It swished back with a tremendous crackling of

twigs, and Carl bolted headlong for the place where he had lost the rifle.

He had no doubt that the bear was pursuing him. He dodged around a beehive and glanced over his shoulder, but saw nothing of the animal. Striking a match, he bent over the earth and was lucky enough to catch the blue glint of the rifle-barrel almost at once.

With a great feeling of relief he picked it up, tried the action and put in a fresh cartridge. The bear had made no sign, and now Carl assumed the aggressive and marched back toward his tree, holding the rifle ready.

He could see the bear plainly, lying in the shadow of the beech, but it did not stir. A suspicion began to grow in Carl's mind. Advancing a little nearer, he threw a lump of wood, hitting the prostrate animal fairly, but still it did not move. Carl chuckled to himself, walked closer, inspected the bear cautiously, and ventured to punch it in the side with the rifle-muzzle.

"Come down, Allie!" he called. "It 's all right. He 's dead!"

There was a crackling of twigs as Alice slipped

down, and then came to look, astonished and almost unbelieving.

"Dead? What killed it?"

"That first shot of mine must have fatally wounded it. Anyway it 's as dead as a door-nail, and seems to have been dead for some time. I expect we might have come down a lot sooner if we had known."

"I wish we had," said Alice. "I think I 'm a pincushion of beestings."

"Well, go and get the bees off you. I 'll light a fire, and then I 'll do the same."

Alice retired into the shadows and loosened her clothing. Carl built a blaze from light wood, got rid of his own bees by brushing and slapping, and dragged the carcass of the bear up to the firelight. It was a medium-sized animal, with a beautiful, black, glossy pelt, but nearly the whole of one side was soaked and stiffened with blood. There was, also, a large pool of blood where it had been lying. It was plain that Carl's first bullet had cut an artery somewhere, and the bear had gradually weakened and lain down to die quietly by the tree.

There was something rather pathetic about this ending of the wild animal, Alice thought, when she had come back and had it explained to her.

"Well, you 'll have your bearskin anyway. That 'll partly compensate for the honey we 've lost through him."

"Do you know how to skin a bear?" Alice demanded.

"No," replied her brother, "but I 've got a knife, and I 'm going to try."

It was then shortly after two o'clock in the morning. They got out their lunch gladly, and ate it by the fire, and then Carl undertook the task of skinning the game. The light was not very good, and he had only a large pocket-knife, so that the operation proved longer and more fatiguing than he had expected.

"I don't know whether I 'm doing this in the orthodox manner," he said as he wrestled with it. "But anyway I 'm getting the hide off all in one piece."

He finished removing it at last, and rolled it up to be taken home. It would need to be washed

free of the blood-stains and combed as well, for there were at least a hundred bees tangled in the fur, where they had died in defense of their homes and honey. The carcass was fat and in fine condition.

"Want some bear steaks, Allie?" Carl demanded.

Alice thought not. The stripped carcass of the bear looked somewhat horribly human.

It was between three and four o'clock by that time, and as the moonlight did not penetrate the woods very well, they determined to wait for dawn before returning. The air was decidedly sharp; the warmth of the fire was welcome. They arranged themselves as comfortably as possible beside it, sat talking for a time, fell silent, dozed, and fell asleep.

They were awakened by a shout. It was broad day, and the east was crimson. By the old roadway Bob was just coming into the bee-yard. He had felt uneasy about them and had started for the lake at dawn, despite his lame foot, bringing a honey-pail full of coffee. At sight of the bear his chagrin was boundless.

"Think what I missed!" he exclaimed. "I 've been hoping for a chance at a bear all this fall, and I 'm laid up at the last moment and Carl kills the bear with my own rifle. Hard luck? I should say so!

"But we certainly ought to take one of this fellow's hams back with us," he continued. "They say it 's better than pork, and we 've no fresh meat except what game we can pick up. Give me that knife."

It was no easy matter to detach the hind quarter with nothing but a jack-knife, but Bob did manage at last to get it off, though he mangled it badly. It must have weighed twenty-five pounds, and the hide and meat would make heavy enough trophies to carry home.

How to dispose of the rest of the carcass was another problem. They did not want to leave it to putrefy in the apiary; they had no means of digging and did not care to throw it in the lake. Finally Carl discovered a little hollow back in the woods, and they scraped it out somewhat with sticks, put in the bear's body, covered it with what

loose earth they could gather, and piled stones over it.

"I suppose one of us ought to stay here to-day and watch the bees, in case of more robbing," said Alice, doubtfully.

None of them felt much inclined for this duty. Bob pointed to the sky, where heavy clouds were rolling up already.

"No use. It 'll be raining by noon," he said. "Rain will keep everything quiet, and if it should clear off sooner, one of us can come out again this afternoon."

So they heated the pail of coffee at the last coals of the fire, drank it, and started homeward, well burdened with the bearskin, the meat, and the two guns. The sky continued to darken; a few drops fell before they gained the cabin, and by ten o'clock a cold, sharp rain was falling. It looked like the first of the autumnal rains; a fire was welcome in the cabin, and Carl and Alice made up for their hard night by a long nap. There was no danger of the bees fighting that day.

It cleared and turned warmer the next morn-

ing, and shortly after noon Carl and Bob walked over to the lake. All was quiet; the bees were flying a little, but were not attempting to rob. Evidently the intermission of that rainy day had caused them to recover from their demoralization.

But they were alarmed to notice that Carl's fire, imperfectly extinguished, had spread among the dry rubbish on the ground till it had been put out by the rain. If the rain had held off, it might have done a great deal of damage. The beehives, made of dry pine, and full of wax and propolis would burn like so many torches.

"I 'm afraid I was careless that time," said Carl. "But we 'll have to come over here with our axes and clear away all this rubbish."

"Yes, and cut a regular fire guard around the yard," Bob agreed. "We can't take any chances on this outfit, and there are always forest fires up here in the fall."

Just now the woods were wet, and there was no immediate danger, so they resolved to put off this duty till after extracting. For another week the honey was allowed to remain on the hives.

Frost fell on three successive nights, but the days were sunny and warm. The maples crimsoned; the woods became a flare of color. They had dried again too, and when Bob went to Morton to order a team to haul the honey, he came back with the report that the village was smoky, and fires were burning in the woods to the westward.

Extracting the honey was no such a hurried task this time. First they cleared out the home yard; then had the full supers hauled in from the lakeside apiary; they took a whole week in taking off the crop, extracting the honey, and packing it in sixty-pound tins, and shipping cases.

The crop of fireweed honey turned out a little over seven thousand pounds of liquid honey, and eighty dozen sections, nearly all of the "Fancy" grade. Besides, they had about two hundred pounds of honey reserved for their own consumption, and for giving away. A generous amount was allotted to Mr. Farr, and they planned to supply Larue with a rich helping if there was any chance of thereby healing up the feud.

"Well, we 're not making the $1,800 we hoped for," said Bob. "But we ought to get $700 for this extracted honey, and about $200 for the sections. Counting what we sold before, that comes to over $1,500."

"Besides, we won't need to feed an ounce of sugar for winter," Alice added. "The hives are so heavy now that they feel as if they were nailed down. How we 'll lift them into the winter cases I don't know."

"Yes, and they 've mostly got young queens," said Carl. "With plenty of food and young queens they 're sure to winter well and make money for us next year. We 've got over two hundred and ten colonies now. Next year we 'll almost certainly clear a couple of thousand dollars."

But they did not get so much for this crop of honey as they expected. The fireweed honey was not quite equal in quality to that from the raspberry. They received only nine cents for the extracted honey, and $2.25 a dozen for the sections. That brought them $810, however; beside they got $40 for a hundred pounds of bees-

wax from the melted-up cappings and bits of comb. The boys voted that $40 to Alice as her fee for doing the uncapping.

There was not much left to be done now, but prepare the bees for winter, but that meant making new winter cases for nearly all the hives at the lakeside apiary. They had already had a load of lumber and a keg of nails taken there, and were waiting till they should have leisure to do the carpenter work.

A few days after shipping the last of the honey, the two boys went over to the lake with their axes, intending to clear the place up as well as possible. When they came within half a mile of the yard they heard the distant, resonant bay of a hound somewhere to the west.

"Some one 's breaking the game laws," remarked Bob, for the open season for deer was still far off. "Probably it 's one of those fellows from Morton."

The voice of the hound was coming nearer, and by the time they approached the lake, it sounded so close that they stopped in the underbrush to watch for signs of the hunt.

In a few minutes a crash sounded in the woods, and a small buck dashed out and plunged into the shallow water. Instantly a rifle cracked from somewhere down the shore. The deer wheeled, turned straight toward the boys, and had come close before it caught sight of them. It swerved again in a panic and went across the bee-yard, clearing the hives in great bounds.

"Crack! crack! crack!" came the reports of the invisible rifle. But the buck, apparently untouched, vanished into the woods. It left a hive with the cover kicked off, and a cloud of angry bees hovering over it.

In another minute the dog came up on the hot trail, yelping and quivering with excitement.

"Why, that 's Larue's hound," whispered Carl.

A moment later the squatter himself emerged from the thickets a hundred yards down the shore and came walking slowly up, with his rifle over his shoulder. The dog had been doubling about where the buck had swerved and now, catching the trail, he dashed into the bee-yard with a loud bay, which was followed by a sharp

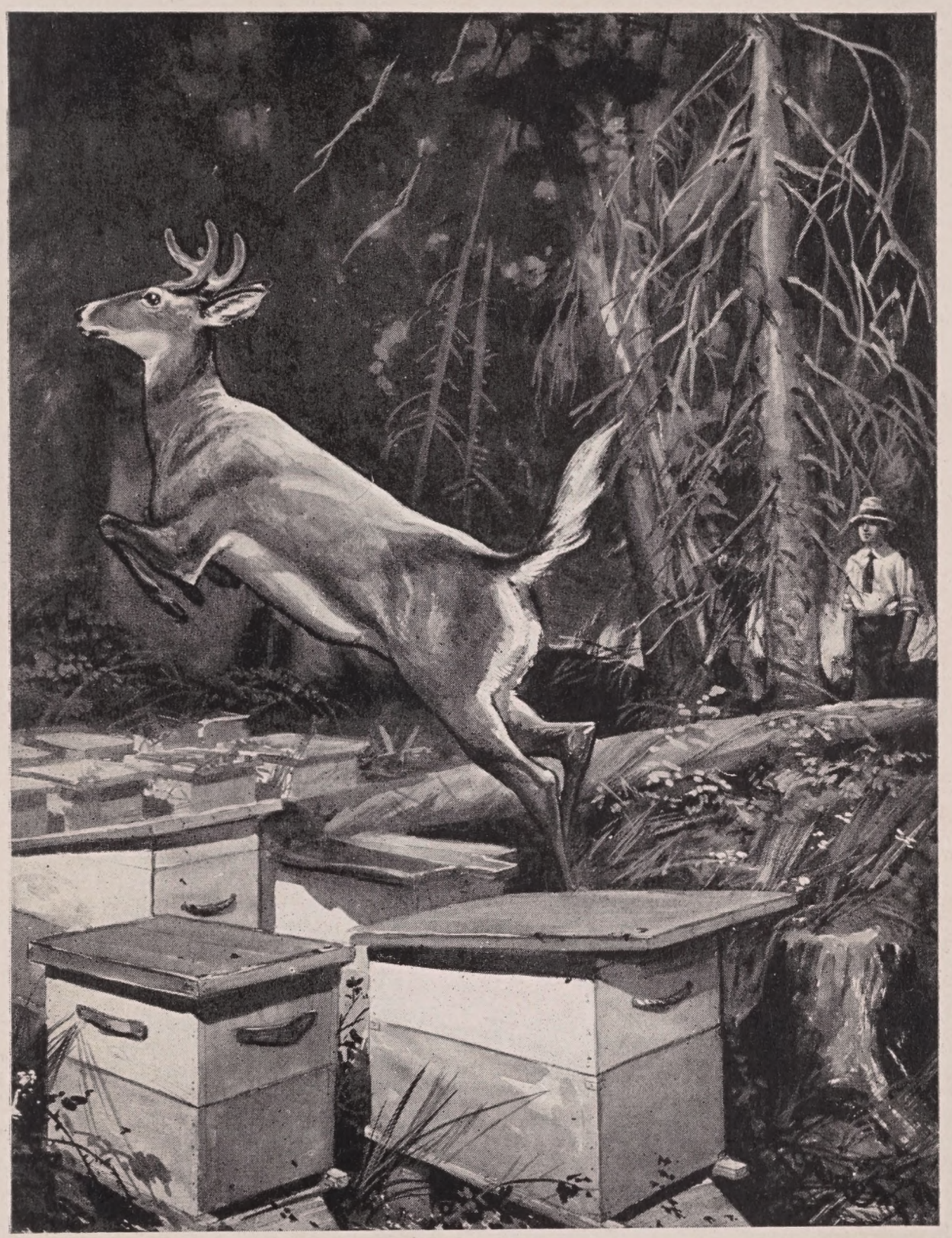
yell. He had blundered right into the hive that the deer had struck, and he was rolling over and over, with brown knots of bees clinging to his hide. Larue ran toward him, but the dog leaped up and bolted into the woods, yelping with pain and fright. He was evidently done with hunting for that day.

The boys squatted down close under the cedars. They heard Larue muttering angrily, and half expected him to shoot up the apiary. But no shot sounded. Perhaps he had grown afraid to meddle with the bees, and after a time they heard him tramp into the woods again.

"Now is n't that the toughest kind of luck?" Carl muttered. "We 're always running afoul of that fellow. Now I suppose he thinks he has a new grievance against us, though it was n't our fault."

"I don't see how we dare go away and leave all this bee outfit alone for the winter," said Bob. "He 'd have it all destroyed before spring. We 've got to make peace with him somehow."

"Mr. Farr said that he 'd never forget a good turn. I 'd take a lot of trouble to do him one,



It wheeled in a panic and went straight over the bee yard, clearing the hives in great bounds

if somebody would only show me how!" said Carl.

For some time they discussed methods of placating him. As soon as they felt sure that he had gone a safe distance from the apiary, they set to work to clear up the fire danger.

It was really too great a task for two pairs of hands. They worked most of that day, cleared up a great deal of the brushwood, dragged fallen logs out of the way, and even made some attempt at cutting a fire guard along the shore. But when evening came they seemed to have made little impression.

"We 'd best hire a couple of regular woodcutters to clear up the whole place and burn the rubbish," said Carl. "We can afford it now."

"Well, we might take another whack at it ourselves, when we come over to make the winter cases," suggested Bob.

They did not return to the lake for nearly a week, being busy at putting the home hives into their winter boxes again, but the place was constantly and heavily on their consciences. The woods had grown very dry again. No more rain

had fallen, and the ground was covered with dead leaves, dry brush, and bark that any spark would set ablaze. Near the cabin there was not so much danger, for the river made a good fire guard on one side, and the woods on the other were mostly of small green spruce and hemlock, which would not burn very readily.

There was fire somewhere certainly. For several days smoke had hung in the west, and the sun had gone down in a sullen haze of red. Almost every day the boys planned to attend to the lake apiary, but some other duty intervened, till, one morning, Alice ran into the cabin with a frightened look on her face.

"There 's smoke in the northwest—toward the lake!" she exclaimed.

Bob and Carl hurried out to look. Smoke was certainly rolling up from the direction of the lake, and there was a light breeze from the north.

"That dry stuff along the shore must have caught somehow!" exclaimed Bob. "What fools we were not to clear it up. But maybe it has n't come near the bee-yard yet. Get your ax, quick, Carl—and run!"

CHAPTER X

FIRE AND WATER

TEARING through the undergrowth, running till they were breathless, walking fast and then running again, the boys made their way through the woods. To save time they took a short cut, but the ground was so rough that it may have proved longer in the end, and before they struck the old logging-road they realized that this was no light blaze in the dead wood. Volumes of smoke surged over the trees, and when they came within half a mile of the lake, they found the way blocked.

Ahead of them the woods were burning to left and right. Hardly any flame was visible, but the forest was choking with smoke and full of the sharp smell of burning cedar. In the distance they could hear the roar of the flames and the occasional crash of falling trees. To save the apiary looked hopeless.

"How in the world did it ever spring up so suddenly?" exclaimed Carl.

"Don't know. But we can't get through this way. Got to go round it!" gasped his brother, and they plunged into the woods again.

Though they were not far from the lake they had to make a wide detour to the west to reach it. What they could do when they got there they hardly knew, but the bees meant everything to them. They could not let the apiary burn without a fight.

Stumbling through the smoke, they reached the lake shore at last. Clouds of smoke drifted over the water, and the fire crashed and roared. Two hundred yards away they saw the beehives dimly and ran toward them. They had not yet been touched, but the fire was burning straight toward the yard, through the rubbish-ricks along the shore.

"Can we clear a belt around them?" cried Carl, doubtfully.

"Too late!" said Bob. "Can't start any counter-fire either. Can't we move them out of the way somehow?"

Standing in bitter perplexity they looked from the apiary to the woods. The fire was coming down the eastern shore; the hives were at the southern end and would certainly be consumed when the conflagration rounded the foot of the lake. There was not much flame in sight, but dense smoke rolled across the water, and hot ashes were falling in showers. These might start fresh fires anywhere.

"We 'll get trapped here ourselves if we don't make haste!" Carl exclaimed.

Bob went down to the shore and dashed water over himself.

"If we only had the boat we could ferry them off!" he said, and then uttered a loud exclamation.

"A raft! a raft! That 's the thing, Carl. Make a raft!"

"Yes, float 'em across the lake," cried Carl. "Or up to the island. That 'll be best. Let 's get the logs together!"

Halfway up the lake, barely visible through the smoke, was the little islet. It was barely twenty yards in diameter, but there was nothing

on it to burn, and it would be a safe refuge if they could get the bees to it.

Bob had already begun to chop furiously into a dead pine log. There was plenty of timber scattered along the shore, and, better still, there was the lumber and the nails that they had brought for the winter case. Time, only, was lacking.

Both boys rushed about frantically through the smoke. They dislodged the logs that lay nearest the water, hewed off the large limbs, and rolled the trunks down to the shore. Splashing in and out of the shallow water, they succeeded at last in getting half a dozen small tree trunks afloat together. Carl dragged down boards from the lumber pile, and Bob spiked them down with the back of his ax for a hammer.

"We 'll never do it!" Carl choked.

But they hauled in fresh timbers, more boards, and nailed them to the first section. The smoke was growing hotter and thicker; they could plainly feel the fierce breath of the fire itself. Pieces of flaming bark and branches were beginning to rain down. A partridge, blinded by the

smoke, whirred over their heads and tumbled into the water.

"Keep going, Carl!" Bob cried hoarsely. "A little more 'll do it."

Working frantically, they managed to put together a few more square feet of raft and cover it with lumber. It was a rickety affair, but it must serve as it was. There was no time to do any more.

"Now all aboard with the bees!" Bob shouted.

He wiped his streaming eyes, seized upon the nearest hive, splashed with it into the shallow water, and set it on the raft. The bees were not flying, but the smoke and heat had caused them to cluster out on the entrances in great lumps. It was impossible to handle the hives without crushing bees, and when this happened they stung savagely.

But it was no time to think of stings, and the boys hardly noticed them. The hives were a heavy weight, however; they were stuffed with willow-herb honey; some of them must have weighed eighty pounds, and the most distant had to be carried over a hundred feet to the raft. It

was hardly possible to handle these single-handed.

Already the fire had burst out around the corner of the lake, and the dry wood around the apiary was ablaze. A flame suddenly sprang up in the middle of the yard, but Carl instantly stamped it out and went on with the work. His hands were bleeding; his back felt as if it were broken. He hardly knew how the last hives got on the raft. But suddenly there were no more of the painted boxes on the shore, and his brother was crying frantically to him to come aboard. He waded into the water up to his neck, helped to shove the shaky raft off, and swung himself upon the logs. With a couple of long poles the boys worked furiously to push the raft into deep water, but it moved with extreme slowness.

The whole shore was now aflame. Masses of blazing wood, driven by the wind, went hissing into the water. The heat and smoke were almost unendurable. But foot by foot the raft crept out into the lake till the water grew so deep that they could no longer reach bottom. They were forced to use the poles as sweeps, and their progress became still slower.

"We 'll save them! We 'll do it!" cried Bob, exultantly.

But they were far from safe. They were about a hundred feet from shore, and the heat was intense. Fire flooded over the whole ground where the apiary had stood. On the raft the air was scorching, and presently honey and melted wax began to ooze from one of the hives. The combs were melting down.

Carl leaned over the edge and dashed water over all the hives, and it steamed up from the hot wood. But he kept splashing them till they cooled somewhat; meanwhile Bob was working hard at the pole. Presently, by good luck, they passed over a shoal spot, and they dug the poles into the bottom, gaining several yards.

At that moment Carl cried out sharply and pointed ashore.

"What is it?" exclaimed Bob.

"Some one out there—I saw him through the smoke—just for a second!" the boy gasped.

They both gazed intently. The drifting smoke-clouds shrouded all the scene. Then, as they blew aside a little, both the boys saw a

human figure, a man, roughly dressed, dodging up the shore at full speed to escape the fire.

"Larue!" exclaimed Bob.

"That 's who it was! For a minute I was afraid it might be Alice come to look for us," said Carl. "But what can that fellow be doing here?"

"He must have got caught on the other shore, and is running around the lake to dodge it. Why, Carl, you don't suppose—"

"No, I really don't think he 'd do such a thing," Carl answered. "To try to burn out the apiary would be too much. He 's making for home. I suppose he 's afraid the fire may burn down that way."

There was no time then to speculate upon him any further. The air was a trifle fresher now, but the raft seemed to be growing more shaky every minute, and the boys were afraid it would actually fall to pieces. They had to propel it with the utmost care, but sparks no longer fell on them, and the little island was growing nearer.

"We 've done it, Carl! We 're safe!" said Bob, and this time he spoke with reason.

Still it took another quarter of an hour of slow and anxious navigation before they grounded the raft on the island. They jumped into the water and began to unload the hives at once, setting them down anywhere on the stony ground. This was another heavy task, but when it was done they wiped their streaming faces, and breathed more freely.

Even here the air was thick with smoke, but it was not hot. Driving before the breeze, the fire seemed to be burning south and west from the lake and was now progressing up the western bank. Probably it would burn for miles, but nothing could be done now to check it.

"You don't think it 'll go near our cabin, do you?" asked Carl suddenly.

"Not unless the wind shifts," answered Bob. "But I think we ought to get back there as soon as we can. No telling what may happen."

"I suppose we can leave the bees here all right till the fire 's out," said Carl, looking critically around him. "But how are we going to get ashore ourselves?"

They did not relish the idea of trying to paddle

the raft over the half mile of water to land, and besides they preferred to leave it where it was for use when they should remove the bees from the island. Both of them could swim, but neither felt equal to a swim of that distance, especially as they were nearly exhausted already. So for a time they sat still on the island, closely surrounded by murmuring masses of their bees, till it was nearly noon, and they began to grow desperately hungry.

"It seems to me a thousand years since I had breakfast," said Carl. "Nothing for it but to swim, I guess."

They looked and dreaded, but there was really no easier way. Stripping off their already soaked clothes, they made them into two bundles, which they tied at their necks, and each took a loose plank from the raft to serve as a float. With this support there was no danger of sinking, though it made their progress somewhat slow, and in half an hour they stepped ashore on the mainland.

The shore was still hot here where the fire had passed, and they had to go up the lake for half a

mile before they found a way around the burned area. Here the fire seemed to have started, spreading southward, and they wondered again what had been its origin.

This necessary detour made it a long tramp home, and they were very tired, blackened, and hungry when they came in sight of the cabin, and perceived Alice scouting about on the trail in front, evidently on the lookout for them.

"Oh, boys!" she exclaimed, hastening toward them. "Are you all right? I've been almost out of my mind with fright. I could see the smoke, and I thought—I did n't know what might happen. I knew you'd try to save the bees. Are they all burned up?"

"Not a bit of it," said Carl. "We rafted them off into the lake."

"Good! But I don't care for anything, as long as you're both safe. You must be hungry. I've had dinner ready for hours. I thought of trying to carry a lunch to you, but I was afraid I might miss you."

"The fire did n't seem to be coming this way, Alice?" enquired Bob.

"Oh, no. Only the smoke was thick. The bees have been frightened and cross all the morning. The fire seems to me to be heading down the river, toward Indian Slough. I hope it does n't get to Larue's place."

The boys washed off the ashes and soot, sat down to the delayed dinner, and ate with appetites worthy of what they had gone through. Now that the physical strain was over, they felt the effects of it, and they ached in every muscle. They were disinclined to do anything after dinner, and they all sat outside the cabin and watched the apparent progress of the fire, as indicated by the smoke over the tree-tops. It was certainly burning down toward the river, but far below them, and it seemed to be rather decreasing than spreading. Bob fancied it had encountered a wet piece of woodland that had given it a check. The sky was overcast besides, looking as if rain might fall before morning. On the whole, things looked safe enough; so the boys went to bed soon after dark, and slept heavily.

Carl was awakened by his brother shaking his arm.

"Get up!" Bob was saying. "Put on your clothes. Hurry!"

Very sleepily Carl obeyed, without knowing what was the matter. Daylight had just come. In the east the sky was crimsoning delicately, but down the river in the southwest, it was all one fierce red glare. A high wind had risen, roaring through the trees, and they could see the reflection of the fire on the smoke-clouds, and now and again even the tongues of flame themselves, leaping against the sky.

Alice and Carl were both out-doors, watching in anxiety.

"It is n't coming this way, is it?" asked Carl, when he had taken in the alarming spectacle.

"No. The wind 's the wrong way," responded Bob. "But it must be burning down mighty near our friend Larue. I believe we ought to take the boat and go down. He may need help."

"Yes, I 'm sure we ought!" Alice urged.

"Seems to me I 've done enough fire-fighting for awhile," Carl grumbled. "Why, yes, of

course we must go," he added. "I 'll be ready in a second. Shall we take our axes?"

"I declare, we left them both at the raft," said Bob. "Never mind; I dare say we won't need them. Alice can stay and keep house again."

"Certainly not!" returned Alice, decisively. "There 's a woman down there and two little girls, and they may need a woman to help them. I 'm going along."

"Well, come along then—but I 'd rather you would n't," said Bob with reluctance.

They all got into the boat and went down stream as fast as the oars and current could carry them. It was growing quite light now, but the morning mists and the pervading smoke blurred the outline of everything. The sky was clouded and stormy-looking. It might rain. Meanwhile the wind blew strongly and seemed still rising.

"If this wind keeps up and no rain falls, it 'll mean millions of dollars loss, beside—very likely —some lives," said Bob. "At this rate, it may go right over Morton."

They had gone a couple of miles down the

stream before they really approached the fire zone. Heavy smoke clouds whirled before the wind; farther down the woods a little way in from the water seemed all ablaze on the right-hand shore, though the fire had not jumped the river.

"Looks as if Larue's outfit had gone!" said Bob.

But as they drifted down things did not look so bad. A short distance back from the river, fire was, indeed, fiercely at work, but along the shore there was only occasional burning trees, dead ones that had been ignited by brands drifting through the air. They expected to encounter the squatter's canoe, but nothing appeared on the smoky water, and they had come down near the beginning of the big slough when all of them, all at once, were startled by hearing a cry from the shore.

"Listen! What was that? Stop!" yelled Bob

They stopped paddling and listened. Nothing was heard now but the snapping wood. But they

had all heard it—a thin, high-pitched scream, like a child's cry—or perhaps the cry of some lynx or wildcat trapped in the burning forest.

"It was some of the Larues! It was one of the children!" cried Alice.

"Must have been. Let me ashore. I 'll find it!" Carl exclaimed.

"You won't go into that blazing wood!" ejaculated Bob.

"It is n't blazing yet, but it soon will be. I can always get back to the river if I 'm forced out. No danger. Keep a close lookout for me if I have to run for it."

Bob looked doubtful, Alice frightened, but Carl shoved the boat a little nearer the land and sprang out into the shallow water. He deliberately dipped entirely under, came up dripping, and disappeared into the smoky woods, waving a farewell over his shoulder.

The shore was lined with dense thickets of willows and small hemlocks, which he brushed through. Pausing, he tried to look about him, but the smoke-haze was so dense that he could not see any distance.

"Any one here?" he shouted. "Larue! Child! *Petite!*"

But there was no answer. Carl pushed further into the woods. There was no fire yet in sight, and the wind made the air less choking than it had been on the day before, but the smashing and roar of the flames in the forest not a quarter of a mile away was tremendous.

He groped his way forward, calling continually and peering everywhere, till the air grew hot, and he found his progress blocked by a clump of dead, blazing spruces.

He backed off then and veered to the right, going for several hundred yards in this general direction, but following a very crooked course. Despite all his calling and looking, he could find no trace of any human being, and he began to consider the search hopeless. Great sparks and pieces of flaming bark were driving overhead and falling everywhere, starting a hundred fresh fires.

"Guess I 'd better see about getting back to the river," he said to himself. "I 'll get cut off if I 'm not careful."

He wiped his watering eyes and turned in what he thought was the direction of the water. In a few minutes he saw the woods open out before him, and he ran forward. But instead of the river bank, he found himself on the border of Larue's clearing.

His directions had become confused. But the clearing faced on the slough, at any rate, and he thought he could contrive to cross the mud to the river. The open space was so thick with smoke that he could see the house and barn only by glimpses, and the river was entirely out of view.

He ran out into the open ground, passing close to the barn, and the memory came to him of the last time he had seen that place, on the night of the bee raid. Nobody would ever see it again, for it was certainly doomed to go in less than an hour.

As he passed, it occurred to him to look in, on the chance that any live animal might have been overlooked there. The inside was dusky and smoky and scattered with dry hay. Carl perceived one of their own supers, which they must have overlooked in removing the stolen honey.

And then he caught sight of a wisp of a pink dress in a corner.

He rushed toward it. It was a child, cowering down by some empty barrels, and he had no trouble in recognizing the youngest of Larue's two little girls. He had admired her great black eyes and olive skin already, but now she was grimy, streaked with black and ashes, and frightened almost out of her senses.

"Child!" exclaimed Carl. "How did you get here! Where 's your papa?"

"Sais pas," whimpered the little one. *"Je veux aller."*

Carl knew just enough French to gather that she was too bewildered to know anything, and that she wanted to go home. He could not imagine how she had been left here,—unless, indeed. all the rest of the family had perished.

"Come along. I 'll take care of you," he said, and he took her hand and led her out. But her five-year-old steps could not keep up with him, and he had to take her up in his arms and carry her.

With this load he knew that he could never

scramble and plunge through the marsh to safety, and he determined to go back by the way he had come. First, however, he put the little girl down, and ran to look into the cabin. No one was there; it was dismantled of all its household stuff and bore the signs of a removal in haste. Plainly the squatter had got away, but Carl could not conceive by what carelessness the child had been left behind.

Picking up the little girl again, he started back through the woods. The smoke was thicker; it was perceptibly hotter, and within thirty yards he found the ground on fire before him. The trees had not yet caught, but the leaves, dead-wood, and underbrush were all aflame or smoldering, making a belt impossible to cross.

Carl turned back across the clearing again, and tried the other side. Here it was even worse, for there was a huge "wind-row" of fallen, dry spruces that was blazing like a furnace. Again Carl was driven back, and when he reached the clearing, he noticed that the roof of the barn was beginning to burn, ignited by falling sparks.

There was nothing left for it, but to try the

marsh. He paused and looked it over, trying to pick out the firmest part, and at that moment he heard two quick gunshots from the river, far out through the smoke.

It was Bob, he thought, signalling his position. He forgot for the moment that they had brought no guns with them. Carl yelled loudly in reply, and strode out warily into the great slough.

At first it was comparatively firm, then he suddenly went over his shoe-tops in mire. He struggled out and tried to step from one tuft of grass to another till the vegetation ceased entirely, and he saw in front a dim expanse of green quagmire, spotted with pools of oily-looking water. It was impossible to pass that way. Carl struggled back to firm ground again, set the child down and looked desperately about.

Scattered fires were breaking out all around the clearing now, and here and there the tall weeds along the marsh were beginning to blaze. Soon it would be impossible to remain even there. He hurried up and down the margin, trying the footing. Nowhere could he find any solid way. No doubt Larue would have known safe trails

through the slough, but in the hurry and flurry of the moment Carl could not hit upon one.

Again he heard two shots from the river. The boat was no doubt moving slowly up and down in front of the marsh. Carl shouted again, but the roaring of the fire and wind was now so loud that he doubted if he was heard.

The child clung to him desperately, but she did not cry. Stoical, from her Indian blood, perhaps, she gazed at him in a sort of wild silence.

"Never mind, *petite!*" said Carl. "I 'll get you safe out of it yet."

But he could not see how it was to be done. If he had a couple of planks, to be laid down and moved forward alternately, he thought he might bridge a way over the slough. He hastened into the cabin again, to see if there was any loose board that he could wrench off. He could find nothing movable that would answer the purpose. The place was littered with scraps of rubbish not worth taking away—a few old muskrat skins, scraps of clothing, a torn blanket, and an old pair of snowshoes.

The sight of the snow-shoes now gave him an

inspiration. He ran out with them and hastily bound them on.

"Here, little one, climb on pick-a-back!" he exclaimed, stooping, and the child obeyed, understanding his gesture if not his words. With her arms around his neck, clasping her feet firmly, he trudged awkwardly out into the weeds of the marsh-edge.

A hurricane of sparks, hot ashes, and bits of burning wood swept over him as a clump of burning trees crashed down close to the shore. He had no difficulty in getting across the first twenty or thirty feet of the slough; the tufts of grass supported him easily. Then the vegetation grew more scanty. It almost ceased, and there were stretches of bare mud, sometimes thinly caked on the surface, sometimes supporting straggly weeds that looked like streaks of green foam.

Fortunately both Carl and the little girl were light weights. Together they weighed less than two hundred pounds, and Carl was overjoyed to find that the snow-shoes held him up whenever there was the smallest scrap of vegetation to bind the mud. The meshes were old and torn.

Brown water bubbled up between them, but they supported the weight as long as he did not pause. As he went farther he had to step more and more quickly to keep from sinking, till at last he was forced into a run. Sinking deeper and deeper at every stride, the snow-shoes scattered the mud in great flakes.

Suddenly he tripped. Overbalanced by the weight on his shoulders, he went sprawling. He clutched at the little girl, who had shot over his head, and dragged her out of an oozy pool. Then a yard away, he spied a rotten log half sunk in the mire, and floundered to it.

On this support he hesitated for a few minutes. Both he and the little girl were covered with mud from head to foot. The shore behind him, was veiled in smoke and he could not yet see the river. He seemed shut off, isolated on that quagmire, in the midst of dimness.

All at once the signal shots banged again, sounding less than fifty yards away. Carl screamed wildly in answer, and, taking the child on his back, started forward again. But the footing became more and more treacherous. He

sank at every step, and the mud flowed over his snow-shoes and weighted them down. It was only by great efforts that he avoided being stuck fast.

But just when the snow-shoes were growing so heavy that he could hardly lift them, he saw sand and gravel mingling with the ooze. A little farther, and a rippling line of water washed over his feet. He splashed into it. In two or three steps he went knee-deep, then to his hips. He heard a splashing in the water, and dimly saw the outline of an approaching boat.

He flung himself forward to meet it, went over his head, and came up trying to swim with one hand and to support the child with the other. The muddy snow-shoes encumbered him; he dipped under again, half-choked; then a hand gripped him by the collar, and he was hauled up to the gunwale of the boat.

"Bob!" he spluttered.

But it was not his brother. It was Larue's dark face that met his, streaked with black now and looking wild with anxiety.

"Rosalie! *Ma petite! T'es sauve!*" he ejacu-

lated and lifted the little girl into the boat. The next instant Carl himself got aboard, half scrambling and half hauled up by the half-breed. Just then another boat rushed up out of the smoke, and he heard Alice calling, "Carl!"

"Here he is! Bo'—bot' safe!" sang out the squatter. "He fin' her! Here he come, crossing ze marsh on my ole *raquettes.* It is wonderful. Mister Harman, zis is w'at I nevaire forget!"

Carl stuttered something, unable to speak articulately. He felt weak and dizzy and full of mingled smoke and water. He saw the faces of Alice and Bob looking anxiously at him, but they seemed to waver, and everything went round dizzily when he lay back in the boat and shut his smarting eyes.

He was vaguely aware of the movement of the boat through the water and of talking voices. He thought some one was dashing spray over him and he made a confused attempt to get up.

"*Restez!*" said Larue, and Carl "rested."

The bump of the boat against the bank brought him to himself. Water was really falling on his face. Looking up, he was amazed to find that

it was raining. The two boats had come to land at the temporary camp where Larue had removed his family. A bark lean-to shed was built against a tree; smoke curled up from a little fire; there was a shriek as Mrs. Larue rushed forward to the boat and seized upon her rescued child.

There was a great scene of excitement and jubilation, and little Rosalie, who had hitherto preserved the silence of an Indian baby, now began to sob as she nestled in her mother's arms.

"He fin' her!" cried Larue, indicating Carl. "I have been crazy. Can't guess where she go. I search everywhere—up, down the river, in ze woods, in ze smoke—can't fin' notting. T'ink she dead, sure. But Mr. Harman fin' her, and cross ze *marais* on ze snow-shoes, by gar! Greatest t'ing I ever see!"

"You 're a hero, Carl," said Bob, laughing.

Larue seemed to be divided between joy and gratitude at the rescue of the child, and admiration at Carl's feat of crossing the slough on snow-shoes. His wife's protestations of gratitude were most profuse, embarrassing Carl terribly.

"It really was n't anything," he stammered.

"Really I found her by accident. But how did she ever get lost?"

Both Larue and his wife volubly attempted to explain, mixing the matter up badly. It seemed that the family had been alarmed about the middle of the night by the approach of the fire, and had moved out in haste. In the darkness and confusion Rosalie had somehow vanished. They had searched and called. Larue, who was very fond of his children, and of this one in particular, was like a madman. After establishing his wife and the other child in safety, he searched the shore up and down the river and went into the woods, without finding any trace of the little girl. On the river he had met Bob and Alice, who told him that Carl had gone ashore, and the two boats had rowed up and down on the lookout, firing signals at intervals with Larue's gun.

Rosalie herself could give no coherent account of how she had strayed away or where she had been. She knew only that she had found herself in the darkness and the woods, had been terribly frightened and was waiting for papa to come for her.

CHAPTER XI

A GOOD SUMMER'S WORK

IT had continued to rain, and it was coming down hard by this time, a cold, driving rain from the north, that would check the forest fire if it lasted long enough. Larue's camp was a miserable place, and far from water-tight.

"We must ask them to come home with us," Alice whispered to Bob. "We can't let the poor wretches stay here in the rain."

Bob looked startled and a little reluctant, but Alice gave the invitation without waiting for him to object.

"Mademoiselle is as good as ze angels," said Mrs. Larue. "Certainely we be glad to go, is it not, Baptiste?"

"Maybe it rain for two—tree days," said the squatter, regarding the sky. "Put ze fire out—good! But zis is terrible poor camp. *Oui,* we go, and many t'anks!"

He put some of his most perishable possessions

in his boat, covered the rest well with bark and boughs, and took his family on board. It was raining in torrents when they passed the clearing again on their way back, and everything was a mist of smoke, steam, and rain. But both the house and barn were still standing, and did not appear to be now on fire.

It was a pretty tight fit for seven of them in the Harmans' cabin, and rather a severe strain on the larder. But Bob went down to the river and caught a dozen trout. Larue sallied into the woods and came back in an hour, soaked like a sponge, but bringing with him five partridges. Mrs. Larue lent a hand at the cookery, and they produced a meal that was at any rate abundant.

All that afternoon it rained, and, as Bob said, every drop was worth a dollar to that imperiled forest country.

"We 'll be able to put our bees back off the island as soon as it lets up," said Carl. "The ground 'll be cooled off pretty well again. You know, Larue," he added, "we had a fire of our own yesterday. Nearly burned up our bees at the lake."

"Yes, and we fancied we saw you through the smoke. But most likely it was n't," said Bob.

Larue had been talking volubly and gaily, but his face suddenly fell.

"Yes, I guess you see me," he said, looking sheepish. "By gar, I am a beast, an assassin. But I have some bad viskey in me yesterday, and I know no better."

"I thought so," said Bob, quietly. "Larue, what did you want to burn us out for?"

"Surely you did n't start the fire!" cried Carl, staring.

"*Voila!*" said the half-breed, contritely. "It was one rotten treek. But, you see, you catch me in bear trap. Your bees sting my cow, kill my hen, sting my dog, sting me mos' to death. So I see ze bee-boxes up there all alone, and I say, 'He sting me no more, by gar!' So I light fires—here, dere, many places at once."

"I would n't have believed it of you, Larue!" cried Carl indignantly.

"Sure, I sorry I do it now. But, you know, I have ze viskey in me yesterday. I get turned round in ze smoke, nearly get caught by ze fire

myself. I see you rafting off ze bee-boxes, and I guess you see me too. And then—ze fire spread and spread, and ze wind he rise, and go clear to ze slough and burn my house."

"I guess you 're punished for it," said Bob. "But we never meant to quarrel with you or do you any harm. You took our honey, you know, and you got stung when the bees went to bring it back. And we did n't set the trap to catch you. We thought it was some wild animal, from the tracks you made."

The half-breed grinned, shamefacedly, yet with just a touch of pride as well.

"Good treek, eh?" he said. "I learn him from a man in ze lumber woods. He steal hogs zat way—make track like bear."

"Fine trick, yes," agreed Bob. "Only you got the worst of it. In fact, you 've come out worst in all your tricks, I believe."

"Serve me right, eh!" Larue admitted. "For ze honey, I steal him when I need ze money bad. But nevaire mind. Zat is all over, and we forget. I ask your pardon for all ze trouble I make you. You save *ma petite,* and I never forget zat.

After now, I am yours. You say to me, 'Larue, come!' and I come. You say, 'Larue, do zis—do zat!' and I do zis, do zat. No money, no pay. I can never pay you for what you do for me."

"All right, Larue, we 're friends henceforth, and we 'll shake hands on it," said Bob; and they shook hands gravely all around to seal the peace.

"You know, when we saw your big tracks we thought it was a wendigo," said Alice, laughing.

"Wendigo?" cried the half-breed, his face clouding. "When you see a wendigo?"

"Why, there 's no such thing," said Carl.

"Do not say zat. Ze wendigo—he is terrible! I have never see him, no—but I know a man, a trapper at Lac Temagimi—"

And he plunged into a terrifying tale of Indian superstition. He was an excellent story-teller, and as he sat with gesticulating hands, and dark, flashing eyes, he held them all fascinated. From this he went on to blood-curdling tales of the loup-garou, or werewolf, ghostly huntsmen, and other horrors of French-Canadian tradition, till Alice begged him to cease. She said she would be afraid to sleep that night.

"Don't you like them?" said Alice privately to Carl that evening. "I think Larue is n't half a bad fellow, and the children are darlings. I like his wife too, and she says she 'll teach me to speak French."

"I 'm afraid it 's a queer dialect she 'd teach you," Carl answered. "But really they 're a pretty decent lot, now we get to know them. Anyway, I 'm tremendously glad we 've made peace."

It rained hard nearly all night, but in the morning only a drizzle was falling, which presently ceased. It was cold and dismal, but the squatter rowed down the river to look at his property. He came back overjoyed. The clearing, he said, was choking with smoke and steam, but the fires were all out, and the house and barn were both standing. The roofs were gone, indeed, but a few days' work would replace them.

"I get some of my friends to help me," he said. "We make a bee, and soon put him right."

"We might let him have that lumber for the winter cases that we put into the raft," Carl whispered to his brother. "It 's scorched and

soaked with water now so that it would hardly do for hives, but it would be all right to mend a roof."

"Good idea!" Bob answered, "and we 'll help him mend it. We 're pretty crowded here, and the sooner he can get into his own house again the better for us."

That afternoon Larue accompanied them to the lake apiary. Where the yard had been was nothing but a waste of wet ashes and rocks, but the fire was out, and at any rate the ground was thoroughly cleared at last. From the shore they could see the hives scattered over the little islet, with the raft aground beside them.

It was quite a problem how to get out to them. But finally, by Larue's advice, they constructed a small raft which carried the three of them over, with a great deal of ricketing and splashing. The bees were all safe, with the exception of three colonies that had been melted down by the heat of the fire, and they set to work at once to load them on the raft again.

Larue was useful at the rafting. It turned out that he was an expert lumberman and river-

driver. He seemed as strong and wiry as a panther, worked gaily and heroically, unmindful of an occasional sting. In fact, the boys could not help liking him, now that they met him on terms of peace. He might have been lawless enough, but he insisted on handling the heaviest end of everything, sang, chatted, laughed, and seemed so determined to win their good feeling, that they were both ready to forgive him all the trouble he had caused them.

The lumber in the raft was now really unfit for use in the bee-hives, and Larue was intensely grateful when they offered it to him. Immediately he went off and hunted up a friend of his, also a half-breed, who had been living unsuspected all this time not five miles away. This man owned a horse and wagon, and next morning he hauled the lumber from the lake to the river, and they rafted it down to Larue's farm. He must also have sent word to Morton in some way, for a couple of days later half a dozen dark-faced fellows came up the river in canoes, carrying saws, hammers, and axes, to assist at the "bee."

Bob and Carl also took part. Two of the visit-

ors were skilful carpenters, and they made the house-roof tighter than it had been before. There was not lumber enough for the barn, but the half-breeds contrived a wonderfully ingenious thatch of logs, mud, and cedar boughs which would turn water as well as shingles.

Bob took the opportunity of sending word back to the Morton sawmill for more lumber. It arrived a few days later, and the boys were amazed to find Larue and the same gang of half-breed helpers come with it. They all went out to the lake, and unloaded the cargo. The half-breeds had been under the impression that a house was to be built, but they were all men who, with an axe and a knife, could make anything from a gun-stock to a boat. It was only necessary to show them how the winter cases were to be made, and the speed with which the boards were cut up and nailed together was marvelous. There was a constant fire of song and chaff in French patois kept up, but the work was all finished so early that the men went into the woods, cut timbers, and ran up the framing of an extracting-house, which could be finished the next season.

They would not hear of taking any pay for this work. However, they all came back to the cabin, where Alice had a great supper prepared of everything eatable that she could find within reach. It was the honey that found greatest favor, however, with the guests; they all seemed to have a child's appetite for sweets, and it vanished in immense quantities. Luckily there was plenty of it, and each of the men was provided with some to take away.

Later in the evening they built a great fire in the clearing, and there by the red light the half-breeds sang *voyageur* songs, *habitant chansons,* old songs that had been sung in Quebec for two hundred years, and some of them in Normandy before that. The half-breeds had excellent voices, and the songs were all new to the Harmans—"Entre Paris et St. Denis," "La Claire Fontaine," and the canoe song with the rattling chorus of "En Roulant ma Boule." This last was a particular favorite.

It was midnight when they broke off, and too late to go back to Morton. Fortunately it was a fine night, and they camped by the fire on heaps

of spruce twigs. In the morning, after drinking an enormous kettle of black coffee, and eating honey and bread, they started homewards, all piled together in the single wagon, laughing and waving farewells. The creaking of the wagon mingled with the diminishing chorus of:

"Rouli, roulant ma boule roulante,
En roulant ma boule roulante,
En roulant ma boule."

It was the gayest time the old cabin had ever known, and it seemed almost lonely when they had gone.

"Jolly lot!" said Carl. "I fancy Mr. Farr was n't far wrong when he said that Larue was n't a bad fellow when you get on the right side of him. Anyhow, it 'll be a great relief to know that we can leave the bee-yard without being afraid that it 'll be robbed or burned out during the winter. I believe that forest fire was worth all the trouble it made."

When they had put the hives back into their winter cases and stored the supplies carefully away in the cabin, the work for the season was finished. Bob was anxious to get back to town

for the fall term, and neither Carl nor Alice were unwilling to leave. The bees would need no more attention for six or eight months, and there was nothing to keep them longer in the woods.

They left nearly all their house-keeping outfit in the shanty, boarded up the windows, and nailed up the door. The wagon came from Morton for their baggage, but they themselves preferred to go down to the railway by the river.

It was a cloudy, chilly fall day when they got into the boat for the last time, not without regret.

"Good-by, old shanty!" called Alice, as they pushed off. "I 'll be glad to see you again in the spring."

They stopped a moment at Indian Slough to leave a few pails of honey for the Larues. The squatter promised to look after their cabin and see that no harm came to anything about the place while they were gone, and they left the whole family on the shore, waving good-by. It was hard to believe that these people had been such bitter enemies a few weeks earlier.

"Well, we have n't done so badly," said Bob,

as they dropped down the stream. "We had about $500 when we came in here. Now we 've got nearly $1000, besides about two hundred and ten good colonies of bees, that will surely make $2000 for us next season."

"And we 've had a lot of fun over it, too," Carl added. "And some pretty tough times, along with fires, bears, wolves, and bee-stings. But it 's been better than keeping a country store."

"I should think so!" Bob exclaimed. "It was the luckiest thing that ever happened when I heard of these bees for sale. I almost wish that we could start at work with them again next month."

"I almost wish that, too," said Alice, "but not quite. I believe I 've had enough wild life for a few months. Now I 'd like something quiet and civilized for a little while—something just like Harman's Corners."

THE END

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